PROTEST AND RESISTANCE IN THE WORKS OF MORRISON, ARMSTRONG AND CULLETON

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, "**Protest and Resistance in the Works of Morrison, Armstrong and Culleton**", submitted to the University of Calicut, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English** is a record of bonafide research carried out by **Binu P.S** under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma before.

(Dr. N.Ramachandran Nair)
Guide

DECLARATION

I , **BINU P.S** hereby declare that the thesis entitled **"Protest and Resistance in the Works of Morrison, Armstrong and Culleton"**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in English, is an original record of studies and bonafide research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr. N.Ramachandran Nair** and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma.

Binu

(Binu P.S)

Preface

The end of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st have been characterized in the academic world as the age of cultural boundary crossing and of the inter-disciplinary approach to the various issues under study. The search for new horizons in scholarship has often replaced essentialist doctrines that restrict the scope of creative writing and research by insisting, for instance, that women alone are entitled to write about women or that only a person from an aboriginal group is able to comprehend the predicament faced by his people. In fact, cross-cultural studies in literature and elsewhere are gaining ground across geographic borders. The aboriginal literatures from Canada, Australia and Africa, for instance, which are now emerging from colonialist negation and marginalization, are receiving academic attention in a country like India which has itself suffered the imperialist yoke in the recent past. African – American literature has also been well received especially under the patronage of such institutions as the Indo-American Centre for International Studies, Hyderabad, the United States Information Services, Chennai and libraries promoting American Studies (now linked together by the internet) all over the country. Similarly , agencies like the Shastri Indo–Canadian Institute, New Delhi and I.A.C.S have been encouraging the study of Canadian literature including the works of the First Nations people. It was such favourable circumstances, together with my own interest in the authors concerned, that prompted me to attempt this comparative study of the novels of

Toni Morrison, the African– American writer of international repute, on the one hand and Jeannette Armstrong and Beatrice Culleton, two prominent representatives of native Canadian literature on the other. The fact that all three are ethnic women novelists adds to the possibilities of comparison and so does the similarities in their perception of the crisis faced by their respective communities and the likely solutions in spite of their cultural differences.

I now proceed to place on record my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. N.Ramachandran Nair, Former Professor .and Head of the Department of English, University of Calicut, under whose benevolent guidance and vigilant supervision this thesis took shape.

I am also indebted to the staff of the English department library and the Central Library of the University of Calicut for their help and co-operation. Let me acknowledge next, my indebtedness to Indo-American Centre for International Studies (formerly A.S.R.C), Hyderabad, U.S.I.S,Chennai, S.N.D.T, Mumbai and Shastri Indo – Canadian Institute, New Delhi for providing access to the necessary research materials and other essential facilities.

My thanks are due to Dr.M. Snehaprabha, Head of the Department of English, Z.G.College, Calicut for her help and encouragement and to Mrs. Rajani.B of the same department who assisted me to collect reading material on Canadian literature.

Words will not suffice to thank my father, Sri. P.R.S.Pillai who typed the numerous drafts of this thesis with infinite patience besides helping me through each and every stage of my work. I am also grateful to M/s.Frontline, Calicut for printing and binding the copies of this work. Last, but by no means least, I record my gratitude to my husband and to all the members of my family for their unstinting and affectionate support which made the completion of this thesis possible.

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Chapter I

Introduction

"The voices of the Unheard cannot help but be of value", wrote Lee Maracle, one of the native women writers from Canada, in the first page of her self defining work, assertively entitled, I Am Woman. This declaration which claims for the author and her people a narrative voice as well as the right to articulate themselves, gains significance in the wake of the ideological changes in the latter half of the 20th century which resulted in the increased political awareness and consequent struggles for self assertion on the part of various communities and culture-groups long subjected to different forms of oppression and discrimination all over the world. Many such communities have begun to articulate their unequivocal protest against race, class, gender and all other forms of oppression by the elite--Euro-American/Christian/male/capitalist--group. This is especially true of the aboriginal peoples of the various continents colonized by the Europeans, such as the First Nations people in America and Canada, for instance, and other racial minorities and marginalized groups like the Afro-Americans in the United States. Literature has become an effective weapon and a powerful mode of self expression for such people to register their protest and resistance against centuries of neglect, rejection and misrepresentation,

and to identify their individual worth and communal strength and thereby, to redefine their role in society.

Toni Morrison, the first African-American woman writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature made a similarly assertive statement, on behalf of artists and writers like herself who have long been silenced and excluded from the mainstream, as she wrote in the Michigan Quarterly Review in 1989:

> Now that Afro-American artistic presence has been discovered actually to exist, now that serious scholarship has moved from silencing the witnesses and erasing their meaningful place in any contribution to American literature, it is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us or imagine for us. We have always been imaging ourselves [...] We are the subjects of our own narrative. Witnesses of and participants in our own experience, and in no way coincidentally, in the experiences of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, 'other'. (cited in McBride 755)

The resemblance of this statement in its tone and implications to the brief but bold declarations of Lee Maracle points to the possibility of a cross-cultural comparison of the literary works of writers from culturally divergent groups, which, nevertheless face common problems, undertake parallel paths of struggle and strive for solutions which are likely to be similar in

essence, without erasing the cultural difference which is a part of their very identity.

The protest raised by such writers also points to the persistent exclusion of their works from mainstream literature. Many among them have attempted to explore the causes that lead to and apparently justify such exclusion. Agnes Grant, to cite an example, tries to analyse the situation in a review of native women's voices in Canadian Literature. After observing how the native readers in Canada find nothing written by or for them in mainstream Canadian Literature, the critic probes:

> Why does this happen? Partly because few native Canadians have been published, but also because our theories of criticism take a very narrow view of literature. We have an idea of what 'good style' is, this idea having fixed and unchanging attributes. We use written European tradition and apply it to literatures from all cultures. This effectively precludes members of other culture-groups from holding influential literary positions and also ensures the continuation of existing criteria. (124)

To overcome the first of these difficulties, which is a result of the colonialist policy of exclusion of the oppressed groups from the mainstream, the native Canadian writers (for instance) have resorted to publishing their works through native--owned and operated publishing houses such as "Theytus

Books." The other problem pointed out by Agnes Grant is that the dictates of the Euro-American criteria for judging good style, and the universal preference of such criteria which justify the marginalisation of literary works from other cultural contexts, forms a vicious circle. It is in this context that many of the postcolonial writers and critics have resisted Euro-American critical trends and methods and have advocated other criteria to evaluate literature from culture-groups other than the dominant Euro-American Society. Linden Peach explains, with reference to black literary criticism, for instance:

> Black literary criticism has been resistant to the various trends such as structuralism, in Euro-American critical practice which posit the separation of the literary text from its author, partly because reclaiming an identity and a [narrative] voice to counter centuries of denial and misrepresentation is central to much post-colonial writing. However, a major reason for this reluctance to divorce text completely from its social and political context is that literature would lose its social function. For African and African-American writers the novel has been an important vehicle to represent the social context, to expose inequality, racism and social injustice. (Peach 2)

There are other critics, however, who reject the literary assumptions and prejudices of the dominant Euro-American culture but not its critical methodology. Gayatri Spivak for instance, considers such resistance to the

established (elite) critical methods and tools to analyse marginalized (subaltern) literatures as a kind of self-marginalization of the subaltern. The critic observes:

> Resisting elite methodology for subaltern material involves an epistemological ontological confusion. The confusion is held in an unacknowledged analogy. Just as the subaltern is not elite [ontology], so must the historian not know [about the subaltern] through elite methods (epistemology) (253).

She therefore recommends the use of the methods and tools of established mainstream criticism for hitherto marginalized literary works produced by women/ subaltern writers.

The current trend in Euro-American literary criticism is to avoid speculative reading of texts in the light of the author's life and intentions. The modern critic would rather focus upon the act of reading itself and on how the reader generates meaning in a text. But while accepting the warning of Euro-American criticism against the over-emphasis of biographical materials, it is unwise to separate any postcolonial text completely from its socio-cultural context for the reasons stated by Linden Peach ie., the social function of such a text and the commitment of the author against marginalization and misrepresentation. A comparative study of the works of ethnic writers like Jeannette Armstrong, Beatrice Culleton

and Toni Morrison therefore, must begin with at least a brief overview of their socio-political background and the biographical context of their writing.

Tracing the development of native literature in Canada, from the oral tradition stretching into the distant past to the present forms of written literature, Penny Petrone records that the 1970s and 80s were a period of phenomenal increase in the creative output by the native people.

> Its enormous range--Poetry, song, autobiography, short fiction, novel, drama, storytelling, retold narratives, history, essays and children's literature--makes this period a turning point in the development of literature in English by Canada's first peoples. (112)

This outburst of creativity in the native people manifests a great degree of self awareness and a determination to articulate themselves which coincides with the political struggles of the native Indians of America and Canada for their rights during the 60s and 70s. The writings of the First Nations people are as much the reflection of the 'Red Power' as the American Indian Movement and other such agitations for self determination.

Penny Petrone goes on to state that in the 1980s a younger generation of university trained writers began to produce "exciting and original works" (138) with great insight into the native socio-cultural situation and the individual's predicament. One such writer was Jeannette C.

Armstrong. Born in the Okanagan tribe on the Penticton Indian reserve in 1948, she was educated in the traditional Indian ways by the Okanagan elders. This in part explains the wisdom and deep insight into traditional Indian life and the native world view that informs her novel Slash. After her formal education at Okanagan college and the University of Victoria, she worked as consultant researcher and writer at En Owkin centre, a native cultural and educational association, and as director of Penticton's En Owkin International School of writing. Actively involved in the American Indian Movement of the sixties and seventies, she wrote Slash (1985) to eradicate misconceptions and to recount the details of that momentous struggle in the history of her people from the perspective of an insider. The novel is as much a historical narrative as the story of a native person's quest for personal as well as communal identity and his struggle to come to terms with the 'living death' imposed on his people by the White racist society. Though Armstrong differentiates herself from mainstream feminist writers by choosing a male protagonist for this novel, she does not overlook the predicament of the native women.

Another of the new generation writers who emerged into prominence at this time of native literary history was Beatrice Culleton who was a Metis writer. Born in St. Boniface in 1949, she became the ward of Childrens Aid Society at the age of three and grew up thereafter in foster homes away from her people. This in fact is significant in understanding her novel, April Raintree, which reflects the barrenness of her formative years and her

alienation from the great Metis tradition. She was educated at George Brown College where she currently resides. In 1983 she published her first novel In Search of April Raintree (reissued in 1984 as April Raintree with the graphic rape scene cut short for high school use). This autobiographical work, thinly disguised as fiction, tells the story of two Metis sisters--who represent the dual aspects of a Metis persona besides being the different individuals they are meant to be--caught between two cultures and struggling to deal with the harsh reality of being halfbreeds in a racist sexist society.

Black literature in America has come a long distance on its way to achieve a distinction, a unique identity of its own, right from the time of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s as M.H. Abrams sums up:

> The unique complexity and diversity of the African-American cultural heritage--both Western and American, oral and written, slave and free, Judeo--Christian and pagan, plantation and urban, integrationist and black nationalist--have effected tensions and fusions that, over the course of time, have produced a highly innovative and distinctive literature. (144)

It was from such a rich literary context that Toni Morrison (Chloe Anthony Wofford) began her writing career. Born in 1931, she grew up in Lorain Ohio which "embraced in microcosm the schizophrenic nature of the Union itself in which the free states of the North and the slave states of the South

were brought together under one umbrella" (Peach 3). Morrison herself perceived this as a significant trait of the state. She explained to Claudia Tale: that the Ohio river has historically represented freedom and that the northern part of the state had underground railway stations and a history of black people escaping into Canada, while the southern part of the state is as much Kentucky as there is. She goes on to say. "Ohio is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base" (119). The influence of this perception and of her formative years in Lorain on her work has been commented on by Linden Peach (1995) who points out that this perspective of Lorain is perhaps the root of two of the major themes in her novels i.e., the pursuit of individual success by Black people in a White-determined society at the expense of their Black ancestry and tradition, on the one hand and the reclamation of Black solidarity based on the 'rememory' of slavery and of White America's continual denial of Black people on the other. Similarly, Mbalia (1991) has traced Morrison's interest in class to her upbringing in Lorain.

Morrison, indeed was successful as a teacher and author though she cannot be accused of having forsaken her own cultural values as some of her characters have done. Educated at Howard University and at Cornell, she worked as an instructor at Howard and then as editor in the textbook subsidiary of Random House at Syracuse until her new identity as a writer (along with the new name of 'Toni Morrison') emerged in the 70s and 80s. Apart from winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, she won the 1988

Pulitzer Prize for fiction for Beloved (1987) and the 1978 National Critics Circle Award for fiction and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Song of Solomon (1977). She has also achieved professorial status with the Schweitzer Chair at the State University of New York, Albany, and the Robert F Goheen Chair Council of the Humanities, Princeton University. Apart from her seven novels, The Bluest Eye (1970, Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977), Tar Baby (1981), Beloved (1987), Jazz (1992) and Paradise (1998), she has written a play and several critical essays including the collection Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination (1992). In her novels she deals with what W.E.B. Du Bois defined as the 'Double Consciousness' of the African – American people. Citing Du Bois, Bernard Bell explains that it is,

> The complex double vision of Americans of African descent whose humanity and culture had been historically devalued and marginalized by people of European descent [...] It was a mythic blessing and a social burden [...] A dialectical process in American society involving the bearers of residual sub-Saharan African cultures on the one hand, and bearers of residual Western cultures on the other hand. For many contemporary Afro-Americans, it is the striving to reconcile one's ancestral African past – however remote, mythic or spiritual – with one's American present, one's ascribed identity with one's achieved identity [...]. (Bell 7)

He goes on to say, what interested Morrison a great deal was "the uncommon efforts of common Black people to deal creatively with their double consciousness and socialized ambivalance" (7).

The differences of the socio-cultural contexts from which the three authors write, cannot be overlooked. The First Nations people in Canada and the rest of the continent, for instance, have endured the colonial experience of dispossession, having been uprooted and separated from the land which was a part of their being. This was followed up by political, economic and socio-cultural marginalisation by the colonizers. Forced into a precarious existence on the fringes of the dominant society, they were as much excluded from mainstream literature as from the mainstream of social life. Agnes Grant remarks:

> The written tradition often overlooks natives because natives are not generally considered a living, contributing factor in all facets of Canadian society. They have been used by numerous Canadian writers as subject matter, as metaphor, as social commentary, but this writing only serves to illuminate the character of non-native Canadian Society while leaving the character of natives largely untouched. (125)

Thus they were objects rather than the subjects of the Eurocentric tradition of written literature and not surprisingly, they were often misrepresented as a race of people "frozen" in the past, as Emma LaRoque (Defeathering II)

says, and doomed for extinction; or again, as a race which is "savage, degenerate and dispossessed" as Bently (1990) notes in his article of the same name, on the depiction of natives in early long poems on Canada. But the majority of works by White writers just excluded them. The void resulting from such exclusion was what provoked the native writers to seek a narrative voice for themselves and to appropriate the colonizer's language to write back.

If colonization was the cause of marginality for the Indians, it was migration and bondage for the African people in America. Racism which justified their enslavement did not vanish with the abolition of slavery though class sometimes seemed to matter more than race, as critics like Mbalia (1991) point out, and though integration seemed an easy choice, especially in the urban North. The Black Americans had only a marginal role in the American society. It was this marginality that Du Bois questioned when he demanded of the White Americans:

> 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 foundation 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? (189-90)

It was this sense of physical, cultural and moral superiority and a need to write their own story and record their predicament in American society, along with the determination to protest against all misrepresentations and stereotyping that prompted the emerging Black writers.

While Morrison writes firmly rooted in the African-American literary tradition, Amstrong and Culleton represent the aboriginal writers in Canada. The two native writers themselves write from dissimilar contexts: the one from the secure and traditional background of the Okanagan Reserve, and the other, from an isolated, rootless urban environment. I do not mean to overlook these differences or to search for the 'universal' in the works of these authors. Indeed it is unwise and unnecessary to expect or demand universality from all artists and to praise or blame them based on its presence or absence, as Arun Mukherjee argues convincingly in her "Vocabulary of the 'Universal'" (1994). Nevertheless, there are recognizable similarities in the perception of these writers of the working of race, class and gender oppression on the life and behaviour of their people, and their attempt, through their novels, to evolve an identity and a voice of their own. Each of them has also presented ways in which their people can effectively resist material and ideological oppression and assert the adequacy and

strength of their own cultural heritage. My project aims to pinpoint these parallels.

Despite their cultural differences, each of these novelists has presented her perception of the different levels--political, economic and socio-cultural--at which oppression operates in the life of her people and the effect it has on the psyche and consequently on their behaviour. They have also reflected on the ways in which dependence on the dominant society has been made to coincide with the marginality imposed on their people.

It was European capitalism with its material and market requirements that led to the colonization of other continents and the exploitation of the inhabitants. It was capitalism again, which necessitated racism. Mbalia observes that "the economic system of slavery, an early form of capitalism, was the cause of racism rather than the result of it" (19). Quoting the economist, Eric William, the critic explains how the early capitalists used the labour of the "white indentured servants" and when their supply was inadequate, tried the American Indians, and later the African Negroes as cheap labour force, and how racism was used to justify the exploitation of these people (Mbalia 19).

Racism has been defined as the doctrine based on the assumption that psychological traits and capacities are determined by biological race and a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to

dominion over others. This domination is exercised through political, economic, social and cultural suppression of the races subject to the domination. To the people of these races, therefore, racism "is not an ideology in the abstract", as Lee Maracle declares, "but a very real and practical part of our lives. The pain, the effect, the shame are all real" (2). Hence the prominent writers of such races, like Toni Morrison (Black American), Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) and Beatrice Culleton (Metis) have tried through their novels to explore how the marginality of their people "has been constructed by the hegemonic forces of imperialism and capitalism" as Barbara Godard (194) puts it, and the ways in which their people respond to it.

A major means of marginalisation used by the imperialists was to deprive the colonized people of their land which was traditionally an essential part of their lives. Noel Dyck, analyzing Canada's official policy towards its Indian population through the decades, points out how the government's reserve agricultural programme, launched to convert the starving Indian hunters into "self-sufficient farmers" (after their hunting grounds had been taken over by the settlers through conquests and treaties made with the tribals), had "turned into a repressive system for controlling reserve lands and residents." And how the government thereafter "endeavoured to prepare Indians for eventual assimilation" (Dyck 279).

The African-Americans were more seriously dispossessed as they had to endure the traumatic passage to America, after being uprooted from their homeland, as well as total subjugation by the Whites as plantation slaves. And later, as Linden Peach explains, "Share cropping, where a cropper would work for a planter in return for a share of the crop at harvest time, had replaced the old slave plantations. But it was a precarious existence which locked the cropper in a cycle of dependency and despair"(4). Those of the Black people who moved north in search of the bright prospects offered by the industries had, in the process to sever themselves from their community and its traditions which had sustained them.

The evil of alcoholism brought in by the White man added to the native's economic and moral ruin and the state of dependence. The African people in America were also caught in a similar cycle of marginalisation, dependence and moral degradation, even in the post slavery period. While Armstrong presents the evils of colonization, including the issue of land acquisition and the native's land claim, Culleton deals with the disintegration in the life of the natives and the Metis people caused by alcoholism and related problems along with the usual share of race, class and gender oppression, and Morrison depicts the predicament of the Black people who live on the fringes of White American society and are forced to isolate themselves from their community and get into the trap of integration if they are to gain upward mobility on economic and social terms.

The racist policy of subjugation and marginalisation of the colonized/ enslaved races through political and economic oppression was reinforced by creating cultural stereotypes of the supposed inferiority of the oppressed races which rationalized their marginality and perpetual dependence on the dominant race. Such stereotypes and misrepresentations, as Barbara Godard (216) observes, are propagated through the media (Hollywood and television representations) literature and above all, through education.

Education is the most potent weapon used for ideological oppression due to the influence it has on the impressionable minds of young children and adolescents. It has been located by postcolonial writers as the primary thrust of racism and the ideological processing ground for indoctrination. At school the children from the marginalized races are made to unlearn their traditional values, ancestral knowledge, native language and culture and to internalize the Euro-centric values of the oppressors as ideal. This psychological colonization causes deep frustration, rootlessness and a sense of inauthenticity in the indoctrinated individuals. It also erases their awareness of history both personal and communal and as a result such individuals fail to play a meaningful role in society and resort to violence, dissipation and self destruction. The novelists studied here have challenged, through their writings, such ideological conquest of their people and have pointed to the need for decolonizing the mind and spirit of their people, reclaiming their lost heritage and advancing towards more positive forms of cultural resistance. My attempt has been to outline the ways in

which such issues have been treated in the novels of these writers. Four of the seven novels by Morrison ie, The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby and Beloved have been chosen to be compared with Armstrong's Slash and Culleton's April Raintree.

The next chapter entitled "Towards an Authentic Self" deals with the effect of internalized oppression on the mind and behaviour of the oppressed, as presented by the three representative writers. Such internalization due to the ideological conquest and indoctrination by the oppressor leads to self--doubt and self--hatred in the victims and finally results in a dislocated, fractured and inauthentic sense of identity as far as the victim is concerned. The chapter explores how the characters in the novels analyzed here seek to create for themselves an identity, a whole and authentic self by drawing on traditional values and world view and adapting them for a better future.

The material forms of oppression meted out to the non-White races were complemented by ideological subjugation which involved the propagation of the myth of White superiority and consequently, the inherent inferiority of the other races. What the title character in Armstrong's novel says about colonized people is true of any race of people subjected to oppression. "One of the effects of it [colonization] is the way people see themselves in relation to those who are doing the colonizing" (Slash 221). The White men also see themselves in the same, fundamentally unequal,

power relationship and both groups are convinced of the doctrine that the oppressors' values are the most rational and enlightened and that the other races are to appropriate those values and give up their 'savage' ways. As Memmi (95) explains, the situation is controlled by the colonizer so as to render the colonized inadequate, which, increasingly provides the justification for further control. Such indoctrination causes shame in the oppressed people and many of them attempt assimilation to escape the humiliation. But it paradoxically leads them to the deeper shame of self-rejection. Besides, the choice between assimilation and extermination often proves a non-choice as even those who assimilate are, in most cases, rejected by the society which is itself infected with racism. Frustration, anger, self hatred and disintegration seem to be the lot of the oppressed races and it is in this context that the need for a 'third choice' arises.

In addition to race and class oppression, the women of the non-White races were victimized by sexist oppression and by patriarchy as institutionalized sexism. The dictates of patriarchy combined with those of racism placed them in the, lowest level in the hierarchy of dominance. They "had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, nor whiteness nor ladyhood, [as they were below White women who were the 'ladies'], nor anything" (Puri 27). And their men often turned their own frustrated fury on such women. Being women of such marginalized races, the three novelists have highlighted the trauma experienced by such women, and have given them the centre stage in their novels. They have also shown through their novels

how such women strive to overcome the crisis and find an authentic self through such gestures as female bonding. The survival of the women is vital for the survival of their respective races as they have traditionally been the spiritual guides of their people. The significance of the feminine ancestor is a common concern for all three novelists.

The necessary "third choice", which the characters in the novels, and the people they represent, strive after--against the passive acceptance of the hegemonic discourse of the dominant race on the one hand, and an equally hegemonic reversal of it on the other--is a choice that involves a process of struggle. It involves not an escape into the precolonial state of existence but a process of reclaiming their ancient heritage, drawing strength from communal living and collectivism, ancestral wisdom and traditional values to strive for a better future for the generations to come. This process of struggle must in course of time heal the people and help the individuals to realize the true self.

The chapter named, "Function of Violence", explores the different dimensions and purposes of the various kinds of violence depicted in the novels under study. Apart from the physical, psychological, moral, verbal and other types of violence, both inter-racial and intra-racial, the more pervasive and destructive forms of violence ie., that of misrepresentation and erasure; are also studied. An attempt is also made to bring out the

gestures of resistance and even counter thrusts against such violence found in these works.

Writing as they do from a context of race, class and gender oppression and misrepresentation, the works of novelists from marginalized communities often contain frequent instances of violence. This in turn leads to misinterpretation as the depiction of violence in such works is often manipulated to reinforce the myth of the inherent savagery and aggressiveness of the communities represented in these novels. Such misreadings will only help to reinforce the creation and maintenance of racial and other stereotypes. Understanding the instances of violence in such novels in the right perspective therefore, is essential for a better insight into their message and meaning.

Jeannette Armstrong who explores the evil effects of colonization on her people and Beatrice Culleton who delves deep into the psyche of the colonized, as well as Toni Morrison who presents Black American life under duress have depicted the various forms of violence endured by their people at the hands of the oppressive dominant society: physical violence aimed at the "persecution and destruction of all forms of resistance – physical, cultural and political" (Maracle 93), psychological violence of misrepresentation and indoctrination, moral violence of rejection and erasure and so on.

The victims of such oppression and discrimination also lash out in self violence and in acts of violence against their own. Such destructive behaviour on the part of the oppressed is much more complex in nature than the violence perpetrated by the oppressors. The three novelists have depicted such intra-racial violence in their fiction. But these are contextualised and qualified so that they point to the circumstances and the desperation that provoked them rather than to any notion of aggressiveness or innate savagery. The characters in these novels sometimes respond to oppression with acts of counter violence either direct or symbolic. But the novelists have emphasized resilience and more positive forms of resistance on the part of their people rather than protest through violence. The occasionally constructive role of violence has also been hinted at in most of these novels.

The chapter, "Reclaiming the Past", deals with the ways in which the three novelists have attempted to reconstruct and reclaim the history of their people which has been distorted or erased by the oppressors as part of the process of colonization and enslavement.

The negation or distortion of the past of the oppressed, their cultural heritage and their struggles against domination, was an essential part of their subjugation. It was necessary to prevent further resistance, to justify the domination and to ease the guilt of imperialist oppression. The

obscuring of the past of the colonized or marginalized people is achieved either by ignoring and negating it completely by means of exclusion or by misrepresenting the past through the construction of stereotypes. While excluding the past of the oppressed peoples from mainstream literature and history aims at erasing their memory of the heritage, the misrepresentation of history completes the process of othering which rationalizes the domination.

Traditionally the misrepresentation of the native people in Canada and America has taken a dual path ie., they have either been romanticized as noble savages uncorrupted by civilization or looked upon with dread and scorn as the brutal barbarians. The Black Americans have been depicted as dangerous beasts to be subjugated or as the desirably submissive and caring 'uncle Toms'. Since all representation mediates and appropriates experience, the harmful potential of such deliberate misrepresentation is pervasive and as such constructed masks obscure the real people behind them.

The writers who attempt to resist such distortion of the past and present of their people must retrace, revise and reclaim the lost history--individual as well as communal--of their people. The representative writers studied here have all realized that the process of coming to terms with the past will be painful, even traumatic. But the pain would be fructifying and

necessary to heal the wounded psyche of their people and to lead them to more effective forms of resistance to oppression. The resilience and wisdom of the past are also essential for the new generation to shape a better future for themselves and to play a more meaningful role in society.

Towards an Authentic Self

Binu P.S “Protest and resistance in the works of Morrison, Armstrong and Culleton ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Chapter II

Towards an Authentic Self

The most effective means, as well as the most disturbing result of the colonization of America's aboriginal people by European settlers was a system of internalised oppression which nourished and complemented material oppression. The same method was used effectively to subjugate the Afro-Americans and other racial minorities during and even after the era of slavery. As Albert Memmi points out in his Colonizer and the Colonised (1967), internalised oppression is, "the result of the indoctrination of the colonised in their deficiencies as defined by the colonizers - 'laziness' 'savagery' or 'drunkenness' for example - which allow the coloniser to justify and maintain a superior position" (39).

Such indoctrination in turn has greater destructive potential than any other form of political or economic suppression as it not only injures the self respect and confidence of the victims, but even causes self doubt and hatred. Eventually it leads to a confused, dislocated and fractured self.

It is to some of these results of the indoctrination of the oppressed peoples that the titular hero of Jeannette Armstrong's Slash points when he describes the experience of his people:

> Everything the colonizers do tell the Indians they are inferior, that their life style, their language, their religion, their values and even what food they eat, is somehow not so good [...] So it gets transferred in subtle ways by our own people. They get ashamed to look Indian or eat Indian food or talk Indian (221).

This indicates the deep impact not only on the victim's life style and values but on his very self image.

The causes for such ideological victimisation are not far to seek. The early European settlers in America had envisioned a new society which would enable them to cast off the old world traditions and hierarchies and merge into a forward looking community, united in the pursuit of a bright future. Quoting the letters of early settlers which outline this vision, Werner Sollors observes that the tension between "the rejection of old world hierarchies" and the vision of a new people of diverse nativities united in the "fair pursuit of happiness" have been typical of the "American national character" (Sollors 3). But as the capitalist economy supported by imperialism developed and racist oppression proved to be the most effective means to justify and sustain it, the Eruo-American's idealism gave way to the ideological conquest of the non-White races.

Ideological victimization or indoctrination entailed the imposition of Euro-centric values, ideals and idols as authentic and superior over the

traditional beliefs and values of the First Nations people in America and Canada and the enslaved Afro-Americans brought to the continent. At the same time, as Sollors goes on to point out, the American scholars avoided the use of terms such as imperialism while referring to ethnic interactions and used, instead, very ambiguous and elusive terms which he describes as the "safety valves" (5). Writers from the oppressed ethnic groups, however, have attempted to break down such "safety valves" and to expose the real nature and effect of all forms of racist oppression as part of their protest and resistance.

The indoctrination of the oppressed about their supposed inferiority and inadequacy also helped the oppressors to justify their exclusion from the mainstream of society so that the marginalized men and women felt virtually invisible. The words in which Ralph Ellison's "Invisible man" expressed his perception, of his own exclusion could apply with equal justification to any of them: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me [...] They see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination [...] Indeed, everything and anything except me" (Ellison 3). Thus the self awareness of the marginalized people was often wiped out by the dominant society when the latter's misconceptions, "the figments of their imagination" as Ellison's hero puts it, were internalised by their victims. An instance of such misconception is cited by Jane Tompkins in a study of the relationship between the Indians of

America and the European settlers. Referring to her own childhood visit to Inwood Park where American Indians dressed in feathers and blankets "could be seen and touched by children like me" (59), she confesses:

> This event was always a disappointment. It was more fun to imagine that you were an Indian in one of the caves in Inwood Park than to shake the hand of an old man in a head dress who was not overwhelmed at the opportunity of meeting you
>
> [...] My Indians like my princesses, were creatures totally of the imagination, and I did not care to have any real exemplars interfering with what I already knew. (Tompkins 59)

The attitude of the child presented here is not far from that of the adult Euro-American and it accounts to some extent, for the White person's refusal to see the real people behind the masks deliberately forced upon them through ideological oppression.

There is a general assumption that the experience of ethnic minorities in Canada has not been the same as it has been in the United States. Canadians often claim that their nation has always been a cultural mosaic which favoured multiculturalism while the United States has been the melting pot where the non-White races were under pressure to lose their identity. But as a reviewer[1] of Jeffrey G. Reitz and Raymond Breton's study on ethnicity in Canada and the U.S. points out, such an imagined difference

is not historically justifiable. The Canadian society was a closed system with the minimum of diversity. The reviewer also observes that Canada's tolerant attitude to the large number of immigrants and their cultures is a recent development and that the nation has a history of racial conflicts similar to that of the U.S., contrary to popular belief. It is possible, therefore to compare the effects of internalised racial oppression on the psyche of the oppressed ethnic groups in Canada as well as in the United States of America.

The exclusion of these oppressed groups leads them into anger and frustration. The doctrine of their supposed inferiority causes self doubt and self hatred and often tempts them into a seemingly simplistic choice; either to assimilate the values and ideals of the dominant elite group as far as possible or to be wiped out even from the fringes of the mainstream.

Assimilation is the all too common attempt made by marginalised people to escape exclusion, frustration and self hatred by denying and negating that which is defined by the dominant ideology as inferior ie., their own true identity and the traditional ways of life. But paradoxically, this attempt to avoid the pain of rejection by the elite leads to the deeper sorrow, shame and guilt of self rejection. And, though assimilation of the elite values and way of life brings material gains and some amount of recognition to start with, it does not eventually lead to the expected levels of success or

well being as the elite seldom accept the marginalised races on equal terms. Thus the choice between assimilation and oblivion becomes in effect a non choice.

The White community in America and Canada has often impelled the aboriginal Indians as well as Black Americans in subtle ways to assimilate Eurocentric values through systematic indoctrination. The three representative writers studied here have each in her own way, explored the effects of the dominant ideology propagated among their people. Armstrong's narrator-protagonist, Slash sees through the fake idea of a great society based on the negation of all differences ie., a society which favours total assimilation, "Fake, while really the White people wished we would all either be just like them or stay out of sight". (Slash 36). But Margery Fee points out:

> What Slash calls fake ideas -- the ideology conveyed through social institutions and language and practices of everyday life -- are not always obviously fake to those subjected to them, even though they cause confusion and frustration in those for whom they do not seem natural or common sense.
>
> ("Upsetting Take Ideas" 168).

Even Slash is often tormented by the self doubt and frustration caused by such ideological oppression. Similarly in Culleton's novel, Cheryl, the brilliant, all but successful activist, wonders at a critical moment in her life if the views of her assimilated sister about the native people were right after all, "Sometimes I can't help it. I feel like April does, I despise these people these gutter - creatures. They are losers [...] Sometimes I do wonder if these people don't accept defeat too easily" (April 174). While April, her sister who chooses the apparently inevitable path of assimilation, learns too late, the futility of such a choice. Many of Toni Morrison's characters remain more or less entrapped in doctrines of White superiority and the authenticity of the White ideals of beauty, wealth, power and success. The ways in which they pay for it in terms of their own identity is a major concern in her novels.

A specific area of concern that unites these novelists is the plight of the women of non-White races who are marginalised not just by race and class but also gender oppression. As Lee Maracle states in her work which affirms her own womanhood and that of her native sisters, "The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath native man comes the female native. The dictates of racism are such that native men are beneath White women and native females are not fit to be referred to as women" (20). It follows that while the men of marginalised races resist and protest against racist and capitalist oppression, they accept at the same time the privileges offered to

them as males in a sexist society. Moreover, while under the duress of racist oppression, these men often vent their frustration and anger on the only people over whom they are able to exercise power ie., their women and children. The women, however, are not so fortunate, "There is no more privilege attached to being female in a sexist society than there is to being native in a racist one, and even less to being both", as Elizabeth Currie (141) points out defining the double marginalisation of the native/non-White women. The women writers of these ethnic groups therefore, have given prominence in their fiction to the trauma of such women and have also highlighted the role played by women in achieving solidarity and authenticity for themselves and for their people. These writers have also explored the need and the possibility of a third choice, other than those of assimilation and total oblivion; alternative ways of living and functioning in society which would heal old wounds and enable their people to discover their true identity, the authentic self.

Jeannette Armstrong, whose novel provides an insightful analysis of the effects of imposing the dominant Euro-American discourse upon the colonised Indians, explores among other things, the effects of indoctrination of the native people, the attempts of the indoctrinated people to succeed in life through assimilation, the futility of such attempts, the double marginalisation of women and the need for an alternative third choice.

George Ryga wrote in March 1984 in a "Foreword" to Slash that the novel presents "A story of colonialism in Canada and the rest of the continent. Colonialism over the aboriginal peoples, with its own special quality of cultural and physical deprivation and a legacy of racial genocide" (Ryga 9). And the novel reveals itself to be just that. Thomas Kelasket (Slash), the protagonist states in the prologue that he must analyse his life to understand the changes that occurred to make him "a young man full of a destructive compulsion to make change happen" (Slash 13). And in order to do this he needs to explore the effects of colonial and racist indoctrination on his community and other such communities and tribes as well.

The split within the Okanagan community between those that have been the victims of racial indoctrination and those who resisted such doctrines is revealed early in the novel. The Kelaskets and a few others who live "way out a town in the hills" (Slash 16) are able, to an extent, to counter the intrusion of the dominant discourse into their lives by holding fast to their tradition. They live close to nature, cultivating the land and raising their animals. Their lives are still replete with hunting trips, tribal meetings, summer tents and pow-wows. They use the native language, propagate their culture through story telling and songs, and retain close communal ties with each other. They resist any attempt by the dominant White society to disrupt this tradition. Slash's father, for instance refuses to send his children to residential schools where, he feels they would "just

learn how to steal and lie" (16). This fear is based on the conviction that at such schools, which have often been described as the processing plants of indoctrination, the native children are often branded as thieves and then forced by material deprivation to confirm the stereotype, as is evident from the story narrated by Joe, an older cousin of Slash. A similar mistrust is expressed by old Pra-cwa about the opportunity offered to the native people to vote. On being told about the offer, Pra-cwa asks his people, "Why would we want to do that? We wouldn't want them to come and vote for who was going to be our chief. We live different than them and they live different than us" (18). This keen sense of difference, and the awareness of the dangers of erasing it on White man's terms makes the old chief realise that the younger leaders, attracted by such possibilities "could be getting ready to sell us out of our reserves and make us like White people" (18).

In contrast to these self respecting, though economically backward people are the native families nearer to the town who have been more exposed to the ways of the dominant society and the doctrines of White superiority. These are represented in the novel by Jimmy and his people. Having distanced themselves from the traditional way of living and the inner strength it fosters, these people have on the one hand been thoroughly indoctrinated about the superiority of the Whiteman's ways and on the other hand they have fallen prey to the vices of the Whiteman's world such as alcoholism. In other words, these native people are shown/taught the

better side of Euro-American life but offered the worse side so that the ideal they seek remains forever unattainable. Further, the failure to attain the ideal is attributed to the native person's supposed inadequacy. This in turn results in greater frustration and vulnerability in such people.

The boy Jimmy recognises the growing degradation within his family but attributes it to their native identity. He therefore rejects everything Indian and decides, early in life, to assimilate the ways of the White kids at school as a means to raise his self esteem and to win the approval of his friends. He longs to dissociate himself from the inadequacy and hence the inferiority he has been made to feel as an Indian person, and so he confesses to Slash:

> All I know is, I like to feel good. I feel good when White friends of mine talk and joke with me as if I were like them. They only do that if I wear smart pants and shoes and have money to play pool with. I don't like them to think I am like the rest of the Indians. I wish our people were like them. (44)

Though he rejects the tradition bound ways of the Kelaskets and such others as "too damn Indian" (44), Jimmy is aware of the strength and support that such a life offers. Nevertheless, he fails to attribute the degradation of his own parents to their loss of contact with that tradition. It

is ironic that he considers his parent's alcoholism and its ill effects as the justification for his need to distance himself further from the native tradition and to assimilate the ways of the Whiteman's world.

The ideals that Jimmy sets for himself are typically those of the White middle classes and are largely based on material gains. As Noel Elizabeth Currie points out, "(a)ccording to the terms set out in the novel, what distinguishes Jimmy from the other Indians is his concentration on material appearance as opposed to what lies beneath them, which is defined as a characteristic of the White middle class "(142). To achieve material wealth he acquires a diploma in business administration aiming at a good job and plenty of money. His obsession with appearance rather than values is revealed as he states his priorities; he wishes to "wear smart pants and shoes" (44) and to buy "a really classy car" (83), prefers to go with a White girl, hurries past his Indian friends in town and refuses to drink from the bar on the reserve to escape the image of the native alcoholic.

In spite of these precautions however, Jimmy fails to realise his ambition to obtain a place in the mainstream society and to play an effective role in it. The failure is ironically due to the very same doctrines that he believes in. The Whites refuse to hire him due to racial prejudice while the native band councils, infected with the same notions of native inadequacy that he believes in, consider him incompetent for anything but the "puny

jobs" (221). And though he does not yet give up his faith in the success myth which has driven him to despair, he complains bitterly about the prejudice shown by fellow Indians as "one of the hardest barriers to break" (221).

Slash points out this contradiction when he tells his friend, "May be you should look at your own thinking, Jimmy" (221), and then goes on to explain it in terms of the effects of colonisation and the psychological need of the colonised to assimilate. Relating how the colonisers use indoctrination to impress their superiority on the minds of the colonised, he comments:

> So it gets transferred in subtle ways by our own people. They get ashamed to look Indian or eat Indian foods or talk Indian. They reject our religion and our values. They attempt to become the same as the colonizers in as many ways as they can to escape being inferior, or being tainted by it. (221)

Slash also recognises the fact that Jimmy is guilty of adhering to the very pattern of behaviour of which he has been a victim:

> You never know why [...] you feel so much contempt for Indians yourself. Some of us over--compensate by heaping ego - building roles on ourselves to prove we

> aren't the 'average' Indian and that we are worthy of praise by the Whiteman. You usually find people like that in some political role. Probably the ones who won't hire you, Jim. But we each carry some of that in us, in one way or another. (222)

Listening to Slash helps Jimmy to realise the source of his trouble and the need to bring about decolonization and to reclaim traditional values and ethics by way of a solution. He prepares to examine his ideals in this light. But the road to the whole hearted acceptance of his true identity and role in society is a long and rough one.

Slash's own enlightenment, which occurs towards the end of the novel, is preceded by a tedious process of personal struggle and quest. Though raised by a strongly traditional family, which succeeds to an extent in inculcating the native world view in him as is revealed in his lack of interest in material gains and success values, he is not entirely untouched by those doctrines which induce the oppressed people to assimilate. At the new school which introduces racial discrimination and the notion of native inferiority, he envies the fine clothes and smart ways of the White kids, and the dreams of an assimilated way of life presented by Jimmy makes him feel torn inside with divided loyalties. These early doubts however are but momentary while at other times he is aware of his advantage over Jimmy in terms of better access to the Indian language and culture.

As a youth, though he has the wisdom to subvert[2] the American myth of a "great society" and to reveal the real agenda of suppressing all differences embedded in it, and though he is able to recognise the source of the tragic plight of his people as colonization and the hegemony of the dominant discourse, his inability to "make change happen" (13) causes in him anger, hatred and a frustration bordering on an urge for violence. He confesses to his uncle Joe, "Lots of us are like that, uncle. We don't seem to be able to find any answers or fit in anywhere. We keep moving and looking though" (55). The constant wanderings, the urge to "keep moving" is an indicator of the restless quest to "find answers"--the quest for alternative choices which do not necessitate the compromise of his own native self.

Unable to assimilate and opting almost for oblivion, groping his way through self destructive paths of alcoholism and violence, and role constructing paths of political struggle and spiritual disciplining, Slash finally realises the existence of such an alternative choice. He is able to comprehend that "them ain't the only choices. There is another way. It's always been there, we just got to see it ourselves though" (198). This 'other way' is linked to the traditional world view and the wisdom of the community which inculcates love for the land, intimacy with nature, and, through the practice of the medicine ways and spiritual affirmation provides

the people the means to survive as whole persons. The moment of realization of this third choice is the moment of self discovery for Slash:

> It seemed to me a new world had opened up. At the same time I knew it has always been there and had never gone any where [...] I learned many things during that time, about the strength those ways gave the people. I learned about the goodness, the caring and the sharing. Most of all, I learned about me. (202)

This leads him to realize his position not just as an individual person but as "a part of all the rest of the people" (203).

Though Armstrong has chosen a male character as the main narrative voice and protagonist of her novel, the plight of native women, doubly marginalised by the racist sexist power structure, comes through clearly. Slash sees the hierarchy functioning at school:

> There were somethings we were too ashamed to tell. Like all of the White girls laughing at Toni when he asked one of them to dance at the sock-hop. He quit school after that. Also how none of the Indian girls ever got asked to dance at the sock-hops because us guys wouldn't dance with them because the White guys didn't. (35)

The desire of the native boys to escape rejection by the White children who are privileged by the racist society induces them to reject, in turn, the native girls who are even less privileged than themselves in the sexist hierarchy. The same policy of transmitting oppression leads assimilated men like Jimmy to prefer White girls for their wives while young activists like Slash who fight racist oppression through political movement equate their women counterparts with commodities of comfort or pleasure. To enforce the image of the typical tough guy involved in the male dominated American Indian Movement, Slash boasts (and makes use) of the easy access to 'booze', 'drugs' and 'chicks' while the 'Bros' are on the move. These words, as Currie (145) suggests, function as indicators which help to build the rough guy image.

Yet as a native person Slash is not entirely unaware of the strength and nurturing capacity of the Indian women. In moments of retrospection, when no image or role needs to be preserved, he muses; "something about the women in that situation was really admirable. They worked harder than anybody realized [...] The women worked with their heads in ways which guys didn't to make things run smooth when things got rough" (153). Commenting on the "pecking order" that he has seen the women preserve, he confesses "it's really the women who keep things going smooth. All Indian men knew that. We learned early from our mothers and grandmothers that it is women who are the strength of the people" (153).

Thus the dim vision of the intelligence and resourceful ways of the women leads Slash to reflect on the traditional strength and wisdom of grandmothers. It is true, however, that such grandmothers, or matriarchal figures are not given predominance in their novels by Armstrong or Culleton unlike Toni Morrison. "One way of reading Tommy's story", says Barbara Godard analysing Slash, "would be as the narrative of his aimless wandering in the absence of a strong feminine presence: violence rules his life without the power of grandmothers" (Godard 207). This reading finds justification in view of the fact that the community elders, lead by oldman Pra-cwa who try to teach Slash, can hardly match such great matriarchs of native fiction as grandmother Cheechum in Maria Campbell's Halfbreed and the mothers and grandmothers whose voices find expression in Lee Maracle's I Am Woman. But in spite of this absence and Armstrong's refusal to idealise Indian women as goddesses with oracular powers the two main women characters in the novel do play a significant role in the life of the protagonist. His quest "which seems directionless, without a denouement in its repetition and perpetual loss" (Godard 207), acquires a sense of direction when he meets Mardi. It is she who gives Tommy his nickname 'Slash' (which recalls his earlier surrender to violence), and soon her political awareness forms his and it sets him in search of the "all important third choice against assimilation and extermination" (Currie 142). Similarly Maeg, the mother of his son, fulfils the role of a teacher and a source of inspiration by bringing him closer to the tradition from which he

had wandered away. The positive role played by native women, in spite of their double marginalisation, to protect and strengthen their people has been well represented by these two characters.

The influence of these women leads Slash to alternative paths other than the choices offered by the dominant discourse. This third choice is linked to the acceptance of tradition reclaiming the communal past and the bond with the land and above all, doing things "in the Indian way" (words repeated like a refrain in the novel, as Currie (147) points out). Adherence to this path supported by communal bonds and ancestral wisdom involves a process of struggle — the struggle for self determination and self assertion. It is this process, as Slash realises in the end, that in due course will heal the colonial wounds and enable him to survive as an Indian person on his own terms.

Armstrong's novel in short, emerges not only as an insightful political narrative, but as a personal quest of the narrator - protagonist who seeks an authentic self and a meaningful role in society resisting the evils of colonial and racist indoctrination.

Beatrice Culleton presents a similar quest but much more complex as her Metis protagonist is torn between two cultures by virtue of the mixed

race and she cannot claim the assistance of a strong community to support and guide her. Through this character, Culleton explores the material as well as psychological effects of the (non) choice between assimilation and oblivion. The author here has a better scope for analysis as the entire novel, except for a few letters and essays from Cheryl and the occasional voices of some other characters, is set out from April's point of view. (Though Armstrong's Slash also follows a similar pattern of retrospection by a single narrator in the first person, many divergent voices are embedded in the narrative and none, not even Slash's own, is totally privileged over the others).

April's desire to appropriate White values and a White identity for herself is much deeper than the simple need to escape the misery of a family ruined by alcoholism (indeed she does not realize the fact of her parent's addiction until much later in the novel). It is more intense than Jimmy's need to gain wealth and material success and status through a respectable job in Armstrong's novel. She feels White because she looks White like her half Irish mother and as, C.P. Ravichandra points out, "April imposes her own neo - colonial project of attempted assimilation of the self through the visible sign of skin colour on White 'civilized' Canada thus giving rise to a schism, on the rightside (underprivileged) of which is Cheryl" (Ravichandra 74). The 'schism' is created largely due to April's awareness of her privileged appearance which is deep seated in her consciousness to

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such an extent that she is unable to dispel it even while confronting in retrospect the one most brutal experience in her life. Reflecting on how she had been mistaken for Cheryl by her rapists, she says:

> I began wondering for the hundredth time, why they had kept on calling me squaw, was it obvious? That really puzzled me: except for my long black hair, I really did not think I could be mistaken as a native person. Mistaken? There's that shame again. Okay, identified. (April Raintree (129)

The shame that results from the rejection of her Metis identity as other is natural but the reluctant identification of it is extremely difficult for her.

April's construction of her identity is determined to an extent by the dissposessed and uprooted life lead by her parents and native neighbours. They are, in Ravichandra's words, "Survivors uprooted from the unremembered, untexted, erased past of the prairie Metis of the buffalo hunt, and victims of progress brought in by the process of confederation" (74). And unlike the Okanagan Community presented in Armstrong's novel which retains its bond with the land and lives by working on the land, the Raintrees live on welfare or rather, they die a slow death by it through alcoholism, violence, neglect and disintegration. April, like Jimmy attributes their decay to the stereotyped inadequacy and weakness of the natives

rather than to the loss of an entire way of life. Commenting on the living condition of their people whom she has for long rejected as other, she tells Cheryl, "I think it's because they allow it to happen to them. Life is what you make it [...] And they are responsible for their lives" (94). The same conviction leads her to explain rather bluntly to Cheryl that the native people are a lost cause:

> If they want to live in their run-down shacks that are overridden with flies, and who knows what else, and that stink of filth and soiled clothing and mattresses, and if they want to drink their lives away while their children go hungry and unclothed, then there's not much that can be done for them except to give them handouts and more handouts. (92)

Thus she endorses the very pattern, which after destroying the traditional skills of these people, had ensured their total economic dependency on White society and caused the consequent ruin for which they are despised.

The rejection of her Metis identity is also due to the way in which April constructs her self image which in turn is influenced by her consciousness of her physical resemblance to White people from early childhood and the awareness of the difference in skin colour between herself and her sister who resembled the other native children. This

differentiation is revealed in the park scene where she notices two groups of children:

> One group was the brown skinned children who looked like Cheryl in most ways. Some of them even came over to our house with their parents. But they were dirty looking and they dressed in real raggedy clothes. I didn't care to play with them at all. The other group was fair-skinned and I used to envy them, especially the girls with blond hair and blue eyes. (6)

She equates the fair skin, blond hair and blue eyes with visions of beauty, wealth, cleanliness and all round superiority and quickly dissociates herself from the native children though too young as yet to reject her sister and their parents emotionally.

The tendency to subscribe to the doctrines offered by the dominant discourse and the established pattern of othering the less privileged is again revealed in the scene in which April meets a Black man for the first time. She instantly associates him with evil and thinks of him as the mythical boogeyman from the frightful stories she had heard from her father and so she addresses him: "Mr. boogeyman, what do you do with the children you catch?" (3) Though she corrects herself next moment and decides that he

can't be bad, it cannot be denied that she had become "the surrogate White in the locking of the promontories with the black in that brief moment" as Ravinchandra (75) points out. But the significance of such an encounter must not be overestimated, for April at the time is but a child, as the critic himself observes and is indeed unconscious of the agenda working within her. Besides, this pattern is ironically reversed a little later in the novel when, first April and then Cheryl associate the nuns at the orphanage with boogey women.

The need to assimilate intensifies after April's separation from her parents and then from her sister. Her experiences at the orphanage, where she is denied the personal freedom and the emotional comfort of being with her sister, and at the DeRosier Farm, where she is denied human dignity, along with the memory of her own ruined family show April the disadvantage of being Metis while her life with the Dions provides a glimpse of the comfort of White middle class family life. Therefore, as Margery Fee sums up, "already scarred by what she sees as her parents' desertion April, when her new 'family' calls her 'half-breed' and 'squaw' and uses her as a servant, quickly decides she wants to be White" (Fee "Upsetting" 175). This 'decision' is also taken when she once again muses on her skin colour:

> I wasn't really thinking about anything when I noticed my arms and hands. They were tanned a deep golden brown. A lot of pure White people tanned just like this. Poor Cheryl. She

> would never be able to disguise her brown skin as just a tan. People would always know that she was part Indian [...] Anyways I could pass for a pure White person. (33-34)

She also decides to change the spelling of her name from 'Raintree' to 'Raintry' inorder to 'pass' as a part Irish and part French person. The skin colour and the name become tropes of oppression and of the 'have-not' status of her people in April's mind. She therefore rejects them as other to assume a new identity, again of mixed blood, but 'pure White'.

This decision is reinforced by the discrimination experienced by the sisters at school and elsewhere. The rumours of April's supposed misbehaviour, her "fooling with" the foster boys are easily credited by her friends and teachers, against all records of her good behaviour while Cheryl's legitimate protest against the misrepresentation of her people in history is crushed ruthlessly all because they are part Indian. The very distribution of praise and blame in the racist society seems influenced by skin colour. The DeRosiers, with all their deceit get better credit from social workers and school teachers than the Metis foster girls, and it is Cheryl, who looks and feels more Indian than White, who is blamed for an attempted escape of the girls from the De Rosiers Farm though April confesses that she had initiated their flight. All this endorses April's conviction that assimilation is her only means of survival. And though she feels "torn in different directions" (37) at times, she remains consistent more or less in her

ambitions. The tension between her desire to live like a pure White person and the need to fulfil the promise given to Cheryl of being together for ever signifies the schism in her own psyche: the identity crisis of her Metis self. It is with some despair and shame that she confesses to Cheryl:

> You didn't come right out and say it, but I am ashamed. I can't accept [...] I can't accept being a Metis. That's the hardest thing I've ever said to you, Cheryl. And I'm glad you don't feel the same way I do. I'm so proud of what you're trying to do. But to me, being Metis means I'm one of the have-nots. And I want so much. I'm selfish. I know it, but that's the way I am. I want what White society can give me. Oh, Cheryl, I really believe that's the only way for me to find happiness. I'm different from you. I wish I weren't but I am. I'm me. You have to do what you believe is right for you and I have to go my way. (85)

These repetitions, these attempts at articulating her inmost thoughts and convictions lead April to confront her earlier dilemma unequivocally before her sister whom she differentiates and distances from herself. And thereby reveals, at last, her rejection of her racial identity in favour of total assimilation.

The path of total assimilation follows the predictable pattern as April seems to succeed for a while. In fact, she seems to make it to the pinnacle of success, finishing school with a degree that qualifies her for a decent job, and getting married to a wealthy White man to live in the mansion of her dreams. The same obsession with material success and appearances which characterises Jimmy in Armstrong's novel informs April's thoughts and actions at this point: "We entertained a great deal and in turn we were invited to social events and theatres, concerts and dinners and clubs [...] I was forever wondering what the other women thought of me" (88).

The choice of assimilation however proves too soon to be the illusion that it actually is. As Ravichandra sums up, "Whatever the subject race may do, it can never assimilate. Assimilation is only a promise made by the imperium to keep the class enemy at bay" (78). The gradual realisation of this fact begins to dawn on April when she discovers that the very people with whom she sought to identify herself sees her as other at the same distance as she sees the rest of her people. For instance, she overhears her mother-in-law voicing some of her fears to a friend and that brings home the reality of her otherness in the home of the Radcliffs; Mrs. Radcliff says:

> [D]idn't you notice her sister? They're Indians, Heather, well, not Indians but half-breeds which is almost the same. And

> they're not half-sisters. They have the same father and the same mother. That's the trouble with mixed races. You never know how they're going to turn out. And I would simply dread being grandmother to a bunch of snivelling little half-breeds.
>
> (99-100)

It may be ironic that April herself had shared this fear of producing brown skinned children whom she wouldn't be able to love, "How could I give my loving to such children when I still felt self-conscious about Cheryl?" (101), but it was unforgivable for the spokesperson of the dominant race to express it. And for a moment April fights back proudly, returning the same argument reversed: "And thank God I didn't become pregnant by your son. I wouldn't want the seed of your blood passed on to my children" (100-01).

It is not the failure of her marriage, however, that leads April to confront her inescapable racial identity. It is her rape by men who mistake her for Cheryl but identify her, in spite of all her effort, as a halfbreed or rather as a squaw which is almost the same thing to the rapists. Not only do they name her a squaw but also attribute to her the ascribed characteristics of the stereotyped native women — the sexually willing squaw who 'likes it rough': "So you're a real fighting squaw, huh? That's good 'cause I like my loving rough' (111) says one of them as April resists his assault. This stereotyped image of the native women is again in

keeping with the requirements of the doubly oppressive racist, sexist power structure. The purpose of such constructs is revealed by Lee Maracle's comment that the native women were objects of "sexual release for White males whose appetites were too gross for their own women" (18). April then is punished for having mistaken her non-status role in a racist, sexist Canadian society and her rape is indeed "a violent erasure of the myth of effected assimilation which April entertains "(Ravinchandra 78).

While April who opts for assimilation learns its futility, Cheryl who refuses the option is effectually forced into oblivion. It is true that she almost hits the third choice as Slash does through her career as an activist and through her pride in the Metis heritage. Her attempts at self assertion and pride in her Metis identity is evidenced by her enthusiastic study of native history and tradition and her defiant struggle against all misrepresentations. She is presented in a witty scene, for instance, as encountering and resisting effectively the exclusion forced on her by the dominant race by appropriating the very language of the oppressor; one of the White guests at a party, trying to be polite asks Cheryl:

> [B]ut you're not exactly Indian, are you ? what is the proper word for people like you?
>
> [Cheryl says:]
> Women

> [The guest tries again:]
> No, no, I mean nationality ?
> [and Cheryl answers:]
> Oh, I'm sorry. We're Canadians. (90)

Cheryl here refuses the label of Metis though she is proud of it. Margery Fee observes:

> Here Cheryl resists a label which in other contexts she would be proud to adopt in order to resist its exclusionary thrust. First she asserts a common humanity, and when that doesn't work, she asserts a common nationality [...] one which has been implicitly denied by the line of questioning [...].
>
> (Fee "Upsetting" 178)

Cheryl's definition of herself as woman is as much contrary to the expectations of the guest as her identification as Canadian. But Cheryl uses these signs to claim a space for herself.

Cheryl's self image as an activist and social worker and her pride in her racial heritage however are based on her idealisation of her people which in turn is rooted in a romantic fantasy about her family visualised in a pre-colonial state of existence. And when this illusion breaks down through

her encounter with the hard reality about her parents, she lets herself to disintegrate and traverses the willful path of self destruction. When the guilt of her responsibility for April, rape is added to her burden, and she sees her sister in the patronising role of the surrogate White, her self image deteriorates further and she finds escape from the living death by committing suicide, conforming ironically to the stereotyped formula of the "native girls' syndrome" (48) which she and April had sought to debunk. The choice to assimilate or vanish is thus proved to be a non choice which in fact forces the marginalised people to vanish either way.

While Armstrong's novel can be read in terms of the absence of a strong, nurturing matriarch, such an absence is much more conspicuous in Culleton's work: This novel is centred around the politics of Children's Aid and other such social policies which have denied the native/Metis women the opportunity of mothering, even as they denied to the native men the duties of parenthood and to the native children the emotional security of a home. By this system of "rescuing" children from supposedly inadequate parents, the Raintree girls are not only severed from the protecting love of their mother, but also dispossessed of the traditional wisdom of grandmothers. The possible role a strong grandmother might have played in their lives is dimly realised by April when she meets one of the elders at a Friendship Centre with Cheryl. The old woman lays her hand on April's and April is repelled by her touch at first. But then like the Ancient Mariner, she

held April with her eyes and then: "Without speaking a word to me the woman imparted her message with her eyes. She had seen something in me that was special, something that was deserving of her respect [...] I just stood there, humbled. At the same time, I had this overwhelming feeling that a mystical spiritual occurrence had just taken place" (140). This encounter leads April to reflect: "If I'd had such a grandmother when I was growing up, may be I wouldn't have been so mixed up" (140). This event is a pointer to the fact that only when motherhood is restored and the lost feminine traditions reestablished, can the Metis people hope to reclaim their lost strength and wisdom so much essential for their survival as a people. It is important for April, therefore, to adopt Cheryl's son, Henry Liberty when she is willing at last to accept her Metis identity.

When the denial is finally lifted from her spirit after Cheryl's death she is not only able to accept her own Metis self as a whole but to see herself as part of a community as opposed to her former isolation. When she sees an empty whiskey bottle in Cheryl's room, she recognises the real enemy and smashes it yelling, "I hate you for what you've done to my people! our people !" (172). These words signify the change that has come over her. As Margery fee comments:

> In these last two words 'our people', she has opened up a new identity and a new community for herself, opening up the space

> between the two 'authorised' possibilities -- White and the drunken Indian other, both isolated from any community.
>
> ("Upsetting" 176)

Thus April finds the third choice against assimilation and extermination when she decides to strive for a better future for herself and her people on their own terms.

And the struggle is to heal her and enable her people to resist effectively the ideological hegemony of the dominant society. She is all set by the end of the novel to fulfil Cheryl's prophetic words: "When your vision cleared you would be a good person for the Metis people" (140).

Even as the evil effects of White racist propaganda on the identity construction of the native and Metis people have interested Amrstrong and Culleton, the effects of such indoctrination on the psyche and the life style of the African - Americans has been a major concern in Toni Morrison's fiction. This has been especially true since she edited The West and the Rest of Us by the African historian, Chinweizu. Linden Peach comments on this source and its interest for Morrison:

> Chinweizu's thesis that some African people have been so brainwashed by European propaganda that self-hatred characterise the African petty bourgeois must have

> encouraged Morrison to pursue her interest in what drove some African-Americans to seek a White-American identity.
>
> (Peach 1)

Morrison has also explored in some of her novels Chinweizu's arguments on how capitalism gives rise to and maintains racism and how White power gives rise to White racism while White racism in turn serves White power.

Her interest in the effects of racist indoctrination on the Black Americans is manifest even in her first novel, for indeed, The Bluest Eye is Morrison's comment on the harm done by what she herself calls "the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought" (Bluest Eye 95), ie., ideas of success and well being as related to physical beauty and romantic love which in turn are determined by the White middle class value system and imposed on the non-White races as part of racist indoctrination. As Mbalia puts it, "Morrison clearly and correctly understands that the concept of beauty is a learned one" and that "the African's self image is destroyed at an early age as a result of the ruling class's (ie., the European Capitalist class's) promotion of its own standard of beauty" (29). Mbalia sees the economic and socio-cultural power of the dominant class working behind such propaganda. The motive of such propaganda, as the critic goes on to point out is to ensure continual dominance of the ruling class over the rest of

the society. Though Mbalia places class oppression before racist exploitation, they go together in the novel.

This brand of ideological oppression where the elite group promotes their own image as the measurement of physical beauty over the other races, is the more destructive because the ideals thus offered is for ever unattainable to the people of the oppressed races who are permanently convinced of their ugliness by contrast. Morrison presents this process at work in describing the Breedloves: like April in Culleton's novel they admire the Euro-American ideals of blonde beauty but unlike her they are unable to identify with it and are convinced therefore that they are ugly. The omniscient narrator of this part of the story (not obviously Claudia) says of the Breedloves:

> You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly. You looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master [...] had said, 'You are ugly people'. They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement, saw, infact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. 'Yes', they had said. 'You are right'. And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it (Bluest Eye 28).

The mysterious all-knowing master who hands out the cloak of ugliness to them, the oppressor who subjects them to such indoctrination, uses the media and every other socio-cultural means at his command to propagate his own ideals and in accepting these doctrines without question, the Breedloves render themselves most vulnerable to racist oppression. In this they differ from other characters like the MacTeer girls who do their best to resist such doctrines. The resistance is evident in Claudia's response first to the White baby dolls and then to Shirley Temple and to Maureen Peal at school. She establishes alternative standards than those propagated by the dominant discourse when she debunks the ideas of loveliness and desirability associated with the blonde haired, blue eyed White dolls given to her as presents. Instead of admiring the doll's beauty as every one else does, she confesses: "I was physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face and the orange worm hair" (Bluest Eye 13). She therefore wishes to dismember it in an attempt to learn the secret of its magic. She feels the same dislike for the Shirley Temples and Mary Janes and such other models of blonde beauty in the world around her. Her preference of the "ugly" Pecola Breedlove over the "Pretty" Maureen Peal, "a high yellow dream child" (47), as her friend and later, her concern for Pecola's universally hated Black baby, are similar gestures of defiance and resistance of established standards and values favoured by the dominant discourse.

Unlike Claudia and her sister, who do not yield to the Euro-American ideals and therefore do not feel the overwhelming need for assimilation, Pauline Breedlove and her daughter Pecola not only admire the White ideals of beauty, cleanliness and order but also aspire to achieve them as far as possible. They attempt to reach these ideals either by accepting whole-heartedly the marginal role offered by White society and settling for a vicarious fulfillment, as in the case of Pauline, or by hoping and yearning to attain the impossible by means of a miracle as in the case of Pecola. In either case the result is disintegration and destruction of the self and personality of each of them in the long run.

Pauline is educated thoroughly on the most destructive doctrines of romantic love and (European) beauty by the most powerful among media; the silver screen. Isolated from the community which brought her up due to their migration to the North, she finds her early dreams revivified in the movies, but she also learns that every face must be assigned some catagory, some value on the scale of absolute beauty. Also, "in equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap" (Bluest Eye 95). While the world of the movies teaches her what to aspire for, her own reality -- the loss of a front tooth and a ruined foot, two 'ugly' children and a depraved husband--convinces her of the non-attainability of those values in her life. So she gives up her own

home as irredeemable and takes refuge at a place where those ideals may be fulfilled ie., in the home of her rich White employer:

> Here she could arrange things, clean things, line things up in neat rows. Here her foot flopped around on deep pile carpet, and there was no uneven sound. Here she found beauty, order, cleanliness and praise [...] They even gave her what she had never had -- a nick name -- Polly. (99)

And as she slips into the role of an ideal servant, her own family becomes "like the after thoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edge of her day, the dark edges that make the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely" (99). The result of Pauline's acceptance of such a role is a split in her own personality. Like April Raintree she creates a schism by mothering her children, her man and through them, her own Black self. Her maternal love is reserved for her employer's child rather than for her own as is evident from the blue berry cobbler-scene in which she has only abuses for Pecola and her friends; words "hotter and darker than the smoking berries" (85) while her soothing loving words are showered on the pink—and--yellow Fisher girl. Claudia who overhears it feels that "the honey in her words complemented the sun --down spilling on the lake" (85). Pauline rejects her daughter psychologically for being 'ugly' even as April distances herself from Cheryl for looking native. But whereas Cheryl's death lifts the denial from April's

psyche, nothing, not even the break-down of Pecola's sanity seems to clear the vision of her mother.

Pecola herself is yet another victim of the same ideology which idolises the Euro-American concept of beauty, and associates it with virtue and well being. She is the African female adolescent whose self-image and mental balance as Mbalia and others have pointed out, are ruthlessly violated and destroyed by such racist ideals. The narrator of the chapter that describes the Breedlove family comments that while Sammy Breedlove uses his assumed ugliness to frighten others and cause them pain, Pecola "hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed - peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask" (29). The mask soon becomes her face, so much so, that nothing but a miracle, she believes, could save her. For instance, she equates the fights between her parents, their wild behaviour with their ugliness and the inescapable misery of her life with her own:

> As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them [...] If she looked different, beautiful, may be Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. May be they'd say, "why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes." (34)

As this conviction is confirmed by her daily experiences she craves and yearns for pretty blue eyes. The suspended glance of the White storekeeper who looks at her without trying to see her, for "How can a fifty-two- year-old White immigrant storekeeper [...] his mind honed on the doe-eyed virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, see a little Black girl ? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary" (36), and the insults and humiliation heaped on the 'ugly' girl by schoolmates and the rest, gives passion to her nightly prayer for blue eyes. The narrator comments, "Thrown in this way into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people" (35).

Her self rejection is total and static and unlike Jimmy in Slash or April Raintree, Pecola and her mother can never even hope to achieve the assimilation that they desire as it involves, not a change in their socio-economic condition alone, but an impossible alteration in their physical appearance. And while Pauline resigns herself to the ambivalence of a split personallity, Pecola is submerged in her misery. The physical shock of her rape functions as a catalyst to trigger the derangement of her mind which was for a long while sunk in frustration and futile craving. Even in her insanity, which persuades her that her dream has come true, she poignantly yearns for a confirmation, at least from her alter-ego, if not from the rest of

the world, that she, indeed has the bluest pair of eyes in the world. For, the need for superlative success is very much a part of the ideology that she has been made to internalise. And as the narrator (Claudia at this point) comments, "the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (162).

The plight of women under sexist oppression has been as much a concern of Toni Morrison as the problem of racism faced by Black Americans. As a writer who explores, "How free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualised, wholly racialised world" (Morrison Playing in the Dark 4), she inevitably deals with the predicament of Black women and presents in her works the unequivocal account of the dual oppression such women endure. But she also examines the force of circumstances, including racist rigours, that contextualises and qualifies the behaviour of the Black American men towards their women. She therefore cannot be accused of "sowing the seeds of division in what should be perceived as a homogenous community in the face of White oppression", as Peach (36) points out.

The Bluest Eye occupies a significant role in this respect as it gives the centre stage to Black women in general and Black female adolescents in particular. The novel is set down from their point of view and presents

one Black woman's (Claudia grown up) attempt to understand and to come to terms with the wasted life of another. At the same time it tries to analyse the depraved behaviour of a Black man against the context of his own wounded psyche. Unlike Claudia's father who beats up Mr. Henry for trying to abuse his child, and unlike the strong and protective father in the Dick-and-Jane primer which presents the standardised White middle class family, Cholly Breedlove is portrayed as a perverted and vicious drunkard who fights his woman and rapes his daughter. But he is also shown as a lonely orphaned boy whose life becomes a string of remembered humiliations insults and emasculations without the benefit of direct vengeance against the White oppressors. So he directed the fury on the women; on his wife because "She was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact" (31). This does not justify his crimes but it qualifies them.

The novel also celebrates the inner strength and resilience of Black women besides recounting their sorrows. In the chapter that recalls Cholly's past, his aunt Jimmy and her friends are shown as creating harmony even out of the miseries of life and the memory of endured oppression:

> Their voices blended into a threnody of nostalgia about pain. Rising and falling, complex in harmony, uncertain in pitch, but constant in the recitative of pain [...] Everybody in the world

> was in a position to give them orders. White women said, 'do this'. White children said, 'give me that.' Whitemen said, `come here'. Black men said, `lay down'. The only people they need not take orders from were Black children and each other. But they took all of that and recreated it in their own image. (108)

These women and the local healer M'Dear are the first of the many strong, efficient, ever-nurturing women deeply rooted in the African-American tradition that Morrison has created in her novels.

In fact, the characters who resist the assimilationist doctrines and values in the novel, like the MacTeers do not sink into oblivion because of their bond with tradition and the security of a community that responds to every pulse beat of emotion and every event that occurs in their lives. Such characters point to a fruitful third choice between those of assimilation and oblivion.

The very structure of this novel suits the message of the novel as it systematically deconstructs the Euro-American standards, propagated as ideal for all, by using a Dick-Jane American primer. As Peach sums up:

> In its preface, which provides an introduction to some of the chapters, extracts from a Dick-Jane American primer present

> a standardised, White American family embracing Euro-American views of beauty and happiness. This introduces the major theme of The Bluest Eye, that the White voice is inappropriate to dictate the contours of African-American life. (Peach 24)

This primer-extract, repeated in the preface, first without punctuation and then with the spaces between the words removed and the letters run together, reveals the main agenda of the novel ie., to explode the myth it presents and to repudiate the path of assimilation that it advocates.

A similar agenda can be seen at work in Morrison's next novel under study, The Song of Solomon. And here the infinite possibilities of the choices other than those offered by the dominant culture are stressed besides depicting the sterile life that attempted assimilation often leads to. While Macon Dead Jr., Ruth and her daughters, and Milkman in the initial stage of his life which Mbalia (52) calls the "Preliminal stage" depict the assimilationist type, Pilate, Reba and the southside residents, the old men of Danville and the hunters of Shalimar, and even Guitar and the Seven Days represent the various types of people who resist the standards and ideals established by the White society. While the responses and reactions of some of the characters of the latter group are decidedly negative those of the others are positive and effective in establishing alternative values and in creating their identity on their own terms.

Apart from using characters to explore the theme of self discovery and alternate standards and values, Morrison appropriates for her own purpose a mode of writing that has been traditionally associated with White American literature. Linden Peach observes:

> As an African-American with a long standing interest in deconstructing the White frame of reference by which black people have been defined, it is not surprising that in Song of Solomon Morrison should appropriate the archetype of White American literature: the romance narrative. But although Song of Solomon uses the traditional Euro-American mode of narrative [...] The favoured ontology in the book is distinctly African, embracing black folk tales and African legend, giving priority to African Values. (55)

Also, Morrison chooses a male protagonist to undertake the quest, differing in this respect from her practice in most other novels but adhering to the Euro-American tradition. But what the quester discovers is not some hidden treasure (which indeed was his initial motive for the quest), nor some new territory to be colonised (as in the case of the White American pioneers), but himself and his African ancestral roots.

The change in the beliefs, values and the world view of the protagonist, Milkman Dead, the dramatic development of his self and personality, from a helpless little boy who grieves that he cannot fly and is scared of "the things behind him" (35) to the enlightened man who, having discovered his deepest roots in the land, realises that "if you surrendered to the air, you could ride it" (341), is the prime message and meaning of this novel. His views and behaviour before his journey of discovery are determined by those of his father Macon Dead Jr., who is convinced that acquiring and owning things to beat the White men at their own game is the principal goal of life. Such is Macon's faith in the American dream 'from rags to riches' that he distorts his life, exploits everyone around him and distances himself from the rest of the community in its pursuit. The words in which Guitar describes him echoes the opinion of his people, "But I don't have to tell you (he says to Milkman), that your father is a very strange Negro. He'll reap the benefits of what we sow and there's nothing we can do about that. He behaves like a White man, thinks like a whiteman" (225). Guitar goes on to wonder, "How, after losing everything his own father worked for to some crackers, after seeing his father shot down by them, how can he keep his knees bent? Why does he love them so?" (225) And the wonder in his question gains depth in the light of the effect the circumstances of his own father's death and the reaction of the White boss -- who had given them some candy and a little handout instead of compensation--had on his own mind. But Guitar mistakes the motive of

Macon's actions as his love for the White men. It is Milkman who makes a better analysis of his father's behaviour, after he himself rejects the materialist values in favour of tradition much later in the novel. Milkman realizes at this point:

> And his father. An old man now, who acquired things and used people to acquire more things. As the son of Macon Dead the first, he paid homage to his own father's life and death by loving what that father had loved: property, good solid property, the bountifulness of life. He loved these things to excess. Owning, building, acquiring -- that was his life, his future, his present and all the history he knew. That he distorted life, bent it, for the sake of gain, was a measure of his loss at his father's death. (304)

The pursuit of gain (material success), which is a measure of his loss, also leads him to distance himself from his sister. She had shared that loss but had since then refused the cherished views and values and values of the dominant culture which determined his life. She had also refused to steal the gold in the cave which was symptomatic of her rejection of the scramble for material success. It is this rejection and the entirely independent and unconventional life which she adopts that Macon considers unforgivable.

Macon's misdirected life and his relentless quest for success through material gains disrupt, in turn, the lives of his wife and children. To his wife, their large twelve-room house becomes "more prison than palace" (9) due to the `lovelessness' in their life. Though she herself adheres to materialistic values as the daughter of an eminent man, "the only coloured doctor in the city" (1) (who had achieved success on the Whiteman's terms but isolated himself and his daughter from the community), there is no rapport between her and her farm – breed, property-owning husband. The lack of love (and sex) in her life is partly responsible for driving her into an overwhelming dependence on her father, during her into an overwhelming dependence on her father, during his life and after, which in Macon's view, borders on incest. But Ruth's own explanations about her visits to her father's grave reveals a more emotional and psychological dependence than the physical need:

> I had no friends. Only schoolmates [...] But I didn't think I'd ever need a friend because I had him. I was small, but he was big. The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died [...] And for that I would do anything. It was important for me to be in his presence, among his things, the things he used, had touched. Later it was just important for me to know that he was in the world. When he left it, I kept on reigniting that cared for feeling that I got from him. (124)

Ruth's complex need, against the background of her isolation (for even her tea-party - women friends either envied or pitied her) and her sterile life with Macon (where the only mooring she can find is an ugly water mark on the table), is confirmed by Pilate's conviction that her sister in law has been dying of `lovelessness'. The artificial roses that they make are as much symbolic of Ruth's own deprivation as of the oppressed girlhood and the stunted youth of her daughters.

Lena and Corinthians, the daughters of Ruth and Macon are as much victims of their father's oppressive dislike as their mother. The omniscient narrator comments on Macon's family life:

> Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparkled in every word he spoke to her. The disappointment he felt in his daughters sifted down on them like ash, dulling their buttery complexion and choking the lilt out of what should have been girlish voices [...] The way he mangled their grace, wit and self-esteem was the single excitement of their days. (10)

Under such domestic oppression, and bereft of the support and emotional security offered by the community, the girls take refuge in making flashy but lifeless velvet roses which epitomise their life. And as Lena tells

her brother, "I was the one who started making artificial roses [...] It kept me ... quiet. That's why they make those people in the asylum weave baskets and make rag rugs. It keeps them quiet. If they didn't have the baskets, they might find out what's really wrong and [...] do something. Something terrible" (215). It keeps them quiet and also blunts their imagination and restricts their development. Macon Dead uses them as the indicators of his success over the rest and at the same time prevents any articulation of their emotions. "First he displayed us, then he splayed us. All our lives were like that; he would parade us like virgins through Babylon, then humiliate us like whores in Babylon" (218). And when they grow up, Lena resigns herself to her fate and buries her life in flowers living and dead and remains `quiet' except when she pours out all her bitterness to her brother as she believes that he is responsible for obstructing her sister's freedom as part of an uninterrupted routine of exploitation. In Lena's words of protest one finds the full measure of exploitation and oppression endured even by the women of the upper middle class like herself. Morrison here seems to lay greater emphasis on racist, sexist oppression than on class, contrary to Mbalia's views. Unlike Lena, Corinthians undergoes a transformation: from the amanuensis of the state poet Laureate, proud of her college education, her lady-like manners and, the elegant though empty life she lead, to the grown-up woman who finds fulfilment in the love of porter, one of the lowest and poorest of her father's tenants and the kind of man her parents had tried to keep her away from. When she moves with

him, the forty-two year old Corinthians Dead saves herself, at last from her father's values, his home and the smothering, life-consuming red velvet roses.

Raised in a family whose last name corresponds to the spiritual and even the emotional condition of its members, Milkman Dead imbibes the White middle class values and capitalist ideas of his father and remains insensitive to the needs and desires of everyone around him. His free exploitation of women and indifference to the plight of his fellow men are symptomatic of the extent of his spiritual and moral death in the early phase of his life. His negative attitude to women and the willingness to exploit them, characteristic of his distance from the African tradition at this point, is evidenced by his inability to recognise his mother and sisters as anything other than the providers of his needs, his readiness to steal from Pilate, "the woman who had as much to do with his future, as she had his past" (35), and his casual rejection of Hagar after having used her perfect love for years.

Hagar is the one most victimised by Milkman's utilitarian love and by her own faith in the standards of the commercial world. She first commits the mistake of offering her whole self to him in love. And when she is discarded with a cold 'thank you-card', and her vengeance proves as futile as her love, she commits the same error as Pecola Breedlove does in The

Bluest Eye in believing that fanciful clothes, and cosmetics of the commercial world could grant her the perfect (artificial) beauty that would bring her lover back. Her last words, murmured to Pilate and Reba who cannot convince her otherwise, recall Pecola's futile yearning: "He loves silky hair [...] Penny-colored hair [...] And lemon-colored skin [...] And grey blue eyes [...] And thin nose [...] He's never going to like my hair" (320).

The change in Milkman's attitude to women as he moves away from the north and from the bourgeois society of Honore towards the south and the Black American tradition is an indicator of the development of his hightened consciousness. The reason for his fight with the men of Shalimar is as much his rude reference to their women as his pride in his material wealth. But after the moment of self discovery during the hunting trip, when he confronts his inmost self and his bond with mother earth, he learns to respect the magnificent power of Pilates. "Now he knew why he loved her so. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (340). This tribute is significant as the idea of flight has been associated throughout the novel with liberation; from slavery and from the misery of life, and with self fulfilment in the case of Milkman himself. The change wrought on him by his journey of discovery is also evident in his caring -and -sharing love for Sweet which is the counterpoint to his relationship with Hagar, and in his sincere regret over Hagar's death which tempers all his triumphs.

A similar change is evident in his attitude to his people in general. His earlier refusal to share the grief of his parents and the misery of his sisters, and the conviction that he did not deserve to know their troubles, is the result of his adherence to the ideology of individual advancement as opposed to those of communal sharing. His inability to understand Guitar's passion for the Black community, and his indifference to the news of the brutal murder of Emmet Till which rocks the community, indicate the extent of his alienation. The symbolic significance of the white peacock, that Milkman and Guitar encounter as they plan to steal Pilate's inheritance, has been pointed out repeatedly by critics since Dorothy Lee's analysis of the novel.[3] Milkman resembles the pure white bird that tries to but cannot fly well, because it has "(t)oo much tail. All that jewelry weighs it down"(179), in more ways than one. He is enmeshed in White values and ideals which weigh him down along with the vanity of his life and he must reject and get rid of them before he can achieve flight and thereby, liberation or identification with the mythical ancestor. Guitar's advice, "Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" (180), is as much appropriate to his friend as to the bird. Equally significant is his other comment, that if Milkman wants to be a soft-fried egg, then someone must "Bust your shell" (116)--the shell of indifference and a noncommittal life.

This indifference begins to change during his journey south and vanishes as he enters the "liminal" and "post liminal" stages of his life (Mbalia 52). After meeting Reverened Cooper, he realises:

> 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. (231)

And when he speaks to the old men of Danville who had known his grandfather and admired his achievements so much that his death was "the beginning of their own dying even though they were young boys at the time" (237), he speaks to them about his people with the new found warmth that recalls April Raintree's shout, "My people! our people!" at the end of Culleton's novel (172). After the Shalimar hunt, when all his masks and the layers of material trappings that weigh him down fall away, and he is forced to confront his inmost self and achieve real contact with nature, his sympathies develop further. His affection extends not only to his family and the whole community in Shalimar, Danville and Not Doctor Street, but also to the people unknown who had given their names and memories to the places in his country, and even to Guitar who is waiting to kill him. So he is able to address his killer friend, "brother man!" at the moment of their final encounter when "it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost

in the killing arms of his brother" (341). For now he (Milkman) had discovered what Shalimar (Solomon) knew and the knowledge helped him to ride the air.

Among the other group of characters in the novel who reject the materialistic capitalist values and the path of assimilation and isolation, and adopt other choices, Pilate towers above the rest. Unlike her biblical namesake who killed the saviour, she saves Milkman from spiritual death. With her refusal to get interested in wealth and material comfort, her sensual and sensitive nature, and her complete independence of established conventions in American society, she functions as the counterpoint of Macon Dead Jr. Her influence enables Milkman to question the values of his father and thus leads him to the rites of initiation.

In spite of her isolation from her community due to the physical oddity of not having a naval, Pilate keeps herself within the bounds of the community by holding fast to the values and traditions she had learned from her father at Danville and from the people she lived with in Virginia. With her songs and stories (including those that contain the past of her people), her deep respect for names (as evidenced by the snuff box - ear ring with her name in it), and her willingness to accept the responsibility for her deeds and to induce others to do so (as symbolised by the bones she carries around and the box of Hagar's hair that she gives Milkman), Pilate points to

the strengthening and healing potentials of the Afro-American tradition. She is the great matriarch, the nurturer of life and the teacher and healer of her people.

The south side residents in Milkman's home town -- who keep the memory of a man of significance among them alive by naming Not Doctor Street after him in defiance of the rules -- and the old men of Danville, who identify themselves so much with an achiever among them that his unexpected death is equated in their minds with their own, are examples of people who resist the doctrine of their supposed inferiority. So do the hunters of Shalimar who, like Pilate, help Milkman by testing him and revealing their superiority on their own terms. Even Guitar and the Seven Days whose anger and protest against oppression lead them to the insane number-game of killing someone from the oppressor's race every time they kill one of them, represent other choices, other values and standards of self valuation than those offered by the dominant culture (though, indeed, some of these choices, such as those of Guitar and the Days are as destructive as those imposed by the oppressors). This novel, in short, is a manifestation of what has always been of great interest to Morrison ie., the uncommon efforts of common people in her community to survive with dignity under the duress of racist oppression.

While Song of Solomon emphasises the potential strength of the ancient African traditions and world view, and the possibility of the African-American people reigniting their strength and resilience drawing on that tradition, Tar Baby deals with the extent of alienation brought about by the failure of the Black American people to adopt that tradition. Like The Bluest Eye, this novel explores the effects of White values and ideals in favour of which many Black Americans lose contact with the communal and traditional values. Unlike the earlier works of Morrison, Tar Baby is set in the Caribbean island near Dominique and therefore, outside the United States. Mbalia sees the change of setting as an indicator of the author's understanding that all the people of African descent, "[w]hether they live in North or South America, the Caribbean or any other part of the world, are Africans, have a common oppressor, wage a common struggle, and need a common solution" (67-68). It also provides Morrison with the microcosm where she recreates the race class hierarchies of the American society with the White American family of the Streets at the top of the ladder, the Black bourgeois family of Sydney, Ondine and Jadine placed next, and the other servants of the house and the natives of the island occupying the lowest rung. The special interest of the novel is the way in which it explores the results of the embourgeoisment of those among the Black people who are at a higher level in this power structure than the rest and who have distanced themselves effectively from the community in order to achieve a

better socio-economic status and approbation of the White people they serve.

Sydney and Ondine, like Pauline Breedlove, have established themselves as the ideal servants of Valarian Street. And they exemplify a new, adapted category of Afro-Americans while Jadine, their niece and foster child, represents those rare persons who rise above the ordinary through assimilation, make it to the pinnacle of success, and become thoroughly Europeanised in the process. These characters are presented in contrast to the other servants and natives of the island such as Therese Gideon and Alma. And the fugitive, Son, who intrudes in to their lives and disrupts, the established hierarchy reveals patterns of dependence, exploitation and complicity between master and servant, parents and children, and among the Black people occupying different levels of power and imputed superiority.

Sydney, Ondine and Jadine are placed in a position more congenial to assimilation than most other characters in Morrison's novels. Having identified with their employer's culture even in Philadelphia, they are further isolated from their community and uprooted from their tradition by being brought to a tropical island, far away from the U.S. with the family of their employer. And Jadine's education severs her so thoroughly from her legacy that she internalises not just the prejudices of the dominant race but also the

stereotypes created by the Whites as evidenced by the similarity of her reactions to Son to that of Margaret Street. The extent of her assimilation is also revealed in Son's sarcastic comment on her fear of his supposed sexual promiscuity: he asks her "[W]hy you little White girls always think somebody's trying to rape you?" (103) and when it startles her into admitting that she is not White, he retorts "No? Then why don't you settle down and stop acting like it?" (103). But the comment only infuriates her as she sees in it the attempt of a Black man to establish authority over her using race as a pretext.

As a highly successful model, a budding actress surrounded by White boy friends, an intelligent career girl and an expert in art history (which has convinced her of the superiority of European art over those of Africa), Jadine achieves everything that Pauline Breedlove dreamed, Macon Dead coveted, Jimmy aspired and April tried to gain. For, through this character Morrison was trying to explore the results of total assimilation as she told Charles Ruas in an interview (226). Believing in individual advancement rather than commitment to the community, Jadine ignores the criticism of Michael, the idealist son of Valerian Street: " He said I was abandoning my history. My people" (61), she muses casually. But the proud African beauty that she meets in the market unsettles Jadine's convictions and questions her standards and values; the woman-in-yellow was not pretty according to Jadine's standards: "Under her long canary yellow dress,

Jadine knew, there was too much hip, too much bust. The agency would laugh her out of the lobby" (38). Nevertheless, Jadine is transfixed by her transcendent beauty and her eyes too powerful for lashes:

> She would deny it now, but along with everybody else in the market, Jadine gasped. Just a little. Just a sudden intake of air. Just a quick snatch of breath before that woman's woman--that mother/sister/she; that unphotographable beauty--took it all away. (39)

And when that tar-Black woman (the tar baby in which she gets stuck at this point), holding three eggs aloft (as though upholding the value of fertility), looks at Jadine and spits, the latter's triumph, even her boosted self - image is pierced through by her suppressed discontent and in authenticity.

The self doubt and in authenticity deepens after her encounter with Son and is made explicit in her meeting with the swamp women and in the vision of the night women of Eloe. These women remind her of the ancient properties of womanhood which she had lost in pursuit of her urban values. But since she finds it impossible to choose the tradition that they represent, Jadine tries to rescue Son from them even as he tries to rescue her from her inauthentic life. And the unresolved tension in their relationship signifies

the endless clash between opposing ideals and values, for, unlike Jadine. Son believes in traditional communal values in spite of being an exile himself. While he dreams of "Yellow houses with White doors which women opened and [...] the fat Black ladies in White dresses minding the pie table in the basement of the church and White wet sheets flapping on a line"(102), she considers it a measure of his emasculation by the Eloe women. And he in turn, evaluates her dream of gold and honey-coloured silk as an indicator of her alienation from her own. Hence the narrator comments:

> The rescue was not going well. She thought she was rescuing him from the night women who wanted him for themselves, wanted him feeling superior in a cradle, deferring to him; wanted her to settle for wifely competence when she could be almighty, to settle for fertility rather than originality, nurturing instead of building. He thought he was rescuing her from Valerian, meaning them, the aliens the people who in a mere three hundred years had killed a world millions of years old.
>
> (231)

The questions at the heart of their relationship and of the novel is summed up neatly by Morrison: "Mama - spoiled Blackman, will you mature with me? Culture - bearing Black woman, whose culture are you bearing?" (232). Though this conflict, the classic confrontation between the old values of the

tribe and the new doctrines offered by the western world, between community and individual, between nature and culture, remains unresolved in the novel, and though Morrison does not explicitly privilege any one point of view over the others, the ending of the novel, is suggestive. For, Jadine realises that only Son can make her feel unorphaned. But she is so unsettled by the night women of Eloe--who reveal their breasts and look at her indicating their reproach at her in authenticity--that she flees from them and him and leaves for Paris "with no more dreams of safety" (250) like the queen ant who "begins her journey searching for a suitable place to build her kingdom" (251). And Son, who is equally unsettled by her charm and almost rejects Eloe and the black mothers to follow her into her inauthentic life, is guided on to the island by Therese who advises him, "Forget her. There is nothing in her parts for you. She has forgotten her ancient properties [...]. You can choose now. You can get free of her" (263). And when he steps on to the island as though to accept the choice offered to him ie., to go to the naked, blind slaves from the mythical past of the island racing their horses among the trees in the rain forest and mating with the swamp women, it suggests more of a home coming than does Jadine's escape into the world. The concluding passage of the novel affirms this:

> The mist lifted and the trees stepped back a bit as if to make the way easier for a certain kind of man. Then he ran Lickety - split. Looking neither to the left nor to the right. Lickety- split. Lickety-split. Lickety–lickety–lickety-split. (264)

This description of his return is replete with the image of the rabbit of the old tale back in the briar patch, having escaped from the trap of the tar baby, though Son's actual choice remains inconclusive.

Sydney and Ondine who are as thoroughly assimilated as Jadine and have created a superior self image for themselves as the first - rate - buttler and perfect cook of Valerian Street, learn too late what all such people learn at some point in their lives--that their superiority and security are creations of the White master, and may turn out, at any moment, to be nothing more than illusions. They learn it first when Son, the "stinking, ignorant swamp nigger" (85), is invited to live in the guest room while they live "up over the downstairs kitchen" (85), and then again in the Christmas - dinner - scene when Valerian reveals their insignificance by announcing the dismissal of the lower servants without their knowledge : "All of a sudden I am beholden to a cook for the welfare of two people she hated anyway?" (178), he asks from his privileged position when Ondine protests about it. And Sydney's lament, "It's true, ain't it? we were slighted by taking in one thief and now we are slighted by letting another go" (176) results from his realisation that being a "Phil-a-delphia Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name" (140) was not enough to ensure his superiority over the rest of his people. And Ondine, who keeps her White lady's secret of child abuse, and loves her mistress's baby as her own (fulfilling the role of the ideal servant

and the stereotyped Black Mama) is accused of complicity by Margaret herself: "Why didn't you scream at me, stop me, something. You knew and you never said a word [...] I wish you had liked me enough to help me" (207). She is also charged with hiding Margaret's crime in order to play the Black mama - role better: "[A]nd you felt good hating me, didn't you? I could be the mean white lady and you could be the good colored one" (207). This is ironic as Ondine is punished further for what she realises as her failure in mothering Jadine, who learns from her and sydney the values of individual advancement and superiority rather than those of communal sharing and responsiblity, and therefore leaves them behind and departs in search of her own future. She explains too late to Jadine the traditional mother-daughter-bond which she ought to have passed on to her foster child earlier in life:

> Jadine, a girl has got to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman. I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man--good enough even for the respect of other women. Now you didn't have a mother long enough to learn much about it and I thought I was doing right by sending you to all them schools and so I never told you it and I should have [...] What I want from you is what I want for you. I don't want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours (242).

The knowledge of this bond, which Jadine mistakes for an old woman's demand for reciprocating the protection and parenting that she had bestowed on her, is infact part of the traditional wisdom of the African-American women. And the gender solidarity and security resulting from such a bond is more likely to enable a woman like Jadine to over come her identity crisis than her European education.

The other servants, Gideon and Therese, are less exposed to the doctrines and values of the ruling class due to the fact that they have no direct contact with the masters except on rare occasions as when Valerian goes to the wash house to say Merry Christmas to the servants and ends up dismissing them for stealing apples. So great is their distance that the White people and even their servants influenced by their values do not care to know or remember their names or faces. They are referred to as yardman and Mary, and Therese, in turn retaliates by referring to Sydney and Ondine as "bow-tie" and "Machete-hair" (92), and by refusing to acknowledge the existence of White people at all in the world of her imagination. She guesses with accuracy that the light skinned American girl (Jadine) cannot provide the mooring or the fulfilment in life that Son needs and therefore, like Pilate, she attempts to guide him to an alternative choice while Gideon warns him that the "yellow one" (Jadine) is not reliable and that the US "is a bad place to die in" (132-33). Though the conflict of values and ideals remains unresolved in the text of the novel, it is clear that the

only characters who lead a contented life, in spite of their low socio-economic status, are those like Therese (with her magic breasts and her prophetic power) who exist in harmony with nature and with the myths and legends of the island while every other character lives with the alienation of exile.

If the three novels of Morrison discussed above, and those of Culleton and Armstrong as well, deal with the plight of marginalised races in the 20th century the effects of racist indoctrination on them and their consequent efforts to assimilate the values of the dominant race, Beloved, Morrison's next novel entails a journey into the 19th century, when even these apparent choices were not available to the African-American people. This novel explores the era of slavery and the post-slavery-years when the Black slaves and ex-slaves could hardly find a livable space even on the margins and fringes of the dominant main stream society of owners and masters.

Besides exploring imaginatively, the emotional and psychological life of a run-away slave woman and her children, Morrison here presents some instances of the attempts of people who had no right to own themselves, to make room for the "self that was no self" (Morrison Beloved 140).

Most of the slave life in the novel takes place on the ironically named farm "Sweet Home", which presents the experience of slaves first under a benevolent master like Garner and then under a tyrant school teacher who takes over as the master after Garner's death. This transition leads most of them to realise that their very self-concept, their manhood and womanhood were determined by the attitude of the White masters and what they wish to create. Paul. D, one of the `Sweet Home men', (for Garner raised his slaves as "men" and not "boys"), is gradually lead to wonder, "Was that it? Is that where the manhood lay? In the naming done by a Whiteman who was supposed to know? "(125). It takes him the long journey from Sweet Home to Alfred Georgia and then to Ohio (his journey from innocence to experience: from the South to the North: From the era of slavery to the post civil war reconstruction) to discover that he had a self apart, and a "red heart' (117) to claim, and to realise the possibility of healing himself and Sethe by putting "his story next to hers" (273).

The Concept of freedom as the right to claim and own one's self is further explored through the experiences of Baby Suggs, the slave woman on Garner's farm fortunate enough to be bought out of slavery by her son. Even at Sweet Home where life was better than before, she knew that "the sadness was at her centre, the desolated centre where the self that was no self made its home" (140) and when she steps on free ground for the first time, the force and meaning of freedom dawns on her in a flash:

> She didn't know what she looked like and was not curious. But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, 'These hands belong to me. These my hands'. Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new; her own heart beat. (141)

This heart she puts to service in order to heal herself and her people as she is yet another of the great matriarchs who adorn the world of Morrison's fiction. The message she gives to the Black people as she preaches from a clearing in the wood, while her great heart beat in their presence, is a call to claim and love themselves: "In this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it [...] You got to love it, you!" (88).

It is this right to love herself and hers without restraint that Sethe discovers when she escapes from slavery and reaches the home of her mother-in-law to be reunited with her children who, according to her are the best part of herself. As she tells Paul.D, "I was 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 [...] when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon--There wasn't nobody in the world I could'nt love if I wanted to" (162).

Besides this desire to love without limit, it is Sethe's refusal to accept the verdict of the White master, who tried to define her and her children as sub-human, and also her preoccupation with the survival of her children and thereby her race, that triggers her determination to escape. Bernard Bell remarks:

> Sethe's black awareness and rejection of White perceptions and inscriptions of herself, her children, and other slaves as non-human--marking them by letter, law, and lash as both animal and property--are synthesized with her black feminist sense of self-sufficiency. (9)

This refusal to let her children be inscribed as non--human, and this self sufficiency as a Black woman, combine to lead her into her crime of infanticide when she and her children are faced with imminent recapture. Rather than let her children be marked, measured and broken by school teacher, "She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful" (163), and carried, pushed, and dragged them through the Veil between the world of the living and the dead where no one could hurt them, and where she thinks they would be safe. Paradoxically though, Sethe's home is anything but safe as the veil between life and death proves to be thin and the spirit of the murdered daughter Beloved returns to claim her due.

The claim made by Beloved is the same as that of the "Sixty million and more" to whom the novel is dedicated: She claims her destroyed self from her mother for, as an infant at the time of her murder, she could not differentiate herself from her mother, "I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too" (110). This confused articulation (written with spaces in between, but no punctuation) nevertheless brings out her desire to connect and unite with her mother.

Her desire, however, grows beyond all proportion and threaten to devour Sethe's life as a whole. And it is Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter, who rescues her mother with the help of the Black women of the community who exorcize the house and drive the ghost away with the harmony and depth of their music: the sound so intense that it "broke the back of words" (261). The role of these women who ostracize Sethe for her pride and her crime but come to her rescue when she is humbled and helpless, is significant. For, the novelist seems to suggest the need for Black American people, especially the Black women to come together and rescue each other through collectivism and community life.

In a study of Morrison's novels, Yamini K. Murthy has pointed out how Morrison and other Black women writers have emphasized the significance of "female bonding" or developing a strong bond between

women as a means to achieve gender solidarity and self affirmation. She observes that such bonding has been recognised as "Self affirming rituals" by most of such writers (Murthy 81). In fact, examples of such bonding are visible at different levels in the two Canadian novels as well as in the works of Morrison. The narrator protagonist in Slash notices it from a distance as the "Pecking order" (153) among the native women, while the emotional tie of the Raintree sisters on the one hand, and the friendship between Cheryl and Nancy on the other, are instances of bonding at a deeper level in Culleton's novel. Morrison makes use of female bonding in most of her novels as Murthy herself goes on to list. From Claudia's bond with her mother and grand mother, and her friendship with Pecola to the rapport between Pilate, Reba and Hagar and the bond between Baby Suggs and Sethe, the examples are many and varied in their depth and purpose. Murthy's inclusion of the connection between Jadine and the night women of Eloe as an instance of bonding, though in a different way, is interesting. But her conclusion that the women of Eloe lead Jadine to realise that she "belongs to the White culture" (81) overlooks the unresolved conflicts in the novel. At any rate the value of such rites of solidarity cannot be over estimated as they are essential for the survival of the marginalised women and therefore of their people as a whole.

The three novelists studied here are united across their cultural boundaries in their realisation that the only way for their people to escape

internalised oppression and the consequent self hatred or self destruction (as the case may be) is to resist ideological hegemony and indoctrination of the dominant race, and to draw strength, instead, from their respective racial cultures and traditional values of the community. This involves a process of struggle which is nevertheless healing. It is likely to lead their people to choices, values and standards other than those imposed on them by the dominant discourse, so that each member of such marginalised communities may hope to build a future without having to sacrifice, in the process, his/her true and authentic self.

Notes

1. The review of Jeffrey G.Reitz and Ramond Breton's The Illusion of Difference: The Realities of Ethnicity in Canada and the United States, by Satish.K. Sharma, Indian Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. VI, 1997, 150-53.

2. Margery Fee finds a parallel between Slash's criticism of a 'great society' and Harold Cardinal's The Unjust Society (1969) which resisted Trudeau's vision of "just society", in her essay "Upsetting Fake Ideas [...]" Native Writers and Canadian Writing, ed. W.H. New, Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1990.

3. The white peacock is associated simply with the White society by Mbalia (1991). But Peach (1995) agrees with Dorothy Lee (1982) in associating it also with the White values and way of life internalised by Milkman which weighs him down.

The Function of Violence

Binu P.S “Protest and resistance in the works of Morrison, Armstrong and Culleton ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Chapter III

The Function of Violence

The effective study and analysis of literary works produced by people subjected to race, class and gender oppression for centuries often involves the confrontation and interpretation of the high incidence of violence seen in many of these works. As Kenneth Roemer observes in an analysis of violence in native American novels , the frequent depiction of violence by such novelists has often been misread to support racial misrepresentations and also to impose "savage – civilized definitional oppositions" (Roemer 97) in order to justify such misrepresentations. Moreover, discussions involving violence and women often result in gender stereotyping . An attempt to comprehend the nature and function of the instances of violence depicted by the three ethnic women writers under study is essential therefore to a discussion of the elements of protest and resistance against such misrepresentations in their writings.

The concept of violence has gained a wide range of interpretations in recent times. It includes not just the acts of physical violence 'out there in the world' that is depicted in writing especially by authors representing oppressed class, race or gender, but any of the symbolic practices through which one group achieves and others resist domination . Thus the very acts

of reading or writing can not only be about violence but a form of violence in their own right. Thus the violence of representation[1] is as much a subject of critical study as the representation of violence.

Toni Morrison for instance recognizes the violence perpetrated by oppressive language used against racial minorities in America and elsewhere when she declares in her Nobel lecture (1993) that "oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge" she goes on to assert that such language, "designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek--must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability" (Morrison Nobel – lecture). To reject, alter and expose the violence of language therefore is one of the common agenda that unites writers like Morrison, Armstrong and Culleton.

Besides this, the three ethnic women writers have also attempted to confront and come to terms with the actual acts of physical, moral, verbal and other kinds of violence perpetrated on their people by the dominant race, as well as those committed by their people against each other. The latter is as frequent as the former for as Lee Maracle points out to her implied White readers:

> Trapped in a cage of shame we lash out at each other and spare you--more Blacks were killed last year by other Blacks than the death toll during the entire decade of the Irish-English war. And native (American) people are not so far behind. Three quarters of the native inmates of federal Penitentiaries are there for violence against other native people .
>
> (Maracle 85)

This type of intra–racial violence is much more complex in nature and has a deeper impact on the psyche of the victims so that it demands a more careful analysis than inter-racial violence.

As a writer whose mission it was to present the struggles of her people during the most momentous phase in their history ie., the American Indian Movement of the sixties, Jeannette Armstrong confronts through Slash not only the acts of violence committed against her people during the struggle, or by her people against each other in their out-rage, but also the violence of representation that the struggle itself and the people involved in it were often subjected to.

Education, as Lee Maracle argues, has been the primary thrust of racism as it is the most effective means of the subtler kind of violence inflicted through indoctrination and misrepresentation on the impressionable minds of the native children. As the critic explains, it is the educational

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system where the dehumanizing gaze of the colonizer is most present, "teaching the native child that he/she is a cannibal, effacing his/her history and replacing it with a mimicry of the colonizer's narrative." (103). Armstrong presents this system at work early in her novel in the violence of racist misrepresentation at the new school in town; the principal separates the native children from the rest to tell them "the rules":

> You Indians are lucky to be here. We' ll get along just fine as long as you don't steal from the other kids. I want you all to wait here while the nurse comes to check your heads and ask you some questions. Then I will assign you to classes.
>
> (Slash 23-24) .

The image implied in these words is soon made explicit by their schoolmates who call them "frigging Injuns nothing but thieves, full of lice" (24). A subtler form of discrimination, imposed on the native children at school is by means of what Barbara Godard calls "rhetorical violence" (216): one of the teachers for instance, "explained what she wanted (from the native children) in slow Hollywood talk. She said, 'you fix' um little story, Tommy, about how you live'. To the other (White) kids she had asked 'please prepare a short biographical sketch of yourself' (38 – 39) The difference in the language used by the teacher in addressing the native child implies a conviction about the child's inferior intellect as well as his inferior language skills. It is his remembrance of such humiliating experience

that induces Armstrong's protagonist, who shares the fate of most of the native children in confronting this subtle form of violence ie., oppression through misrepresentation, right from school days , to comment later in the novel, as follows:

> [M]ore than passive discrimination. It is an insult to a whole race of people thousands of generations old. And that kind of discrimination does more damage, overall than any cops kicking the shit out of a drunken Indian. I mean, like that's the main trouble why that Indian was drunk, why a lot of Indians are drunk. I get real mad inside that our people seem to be looked on as if we were less than just different. (86)

It is to counter such an outrage of misrepresentation that the little children from Slash's reserve, instructed by their elders. Make a bold and effective statement through the simple device of exchanging gifts at a Christmas party organized for them by a White club. When Slash's sister Jenny, one among the children brought there to receive gifts and food, announces that she has brought gifts from her people for the organizers, she locates herself on an equal position to theirs. She assumes a role totally different from that imposed by the dominant society which often uses the media – represented by the radio station.- man in this scene – to propagate the image of the ever dependant native placed inevitably at the receiving end. This act of resistance and the resulting reversal of roles

cause confusion in the organizers and a sense of pride in the child. Slash who narrates the event recalls: "She looked real proud when she said, 'my mom made these buckskin coin purses for you'. They didn't know what to say. The ladies looked funny like they were ashamed to take the presents" (30). It is in such gestures of redefining and resistance, Armstrong seems to suggest, that the real antidote for the violence of misrepresentation lies.

The solution however is often not obvious or not accessible to the victims of misrepresentation and stereotyping and the fury that develops in their minds as a consequence often leads to intra-racial violence or some other form of degradation and dissipation such as alcoholism . Slash's own quest in its initial stages is ridden with such ineffectual and negative feelings as anger and hate and "a destructive compulsion to make change happen" (13) without the knowledge or power to do it. The resulting paralysis of his own mind is reflected in his description of the people he meets in the city as much as it reflects their actual condition;

> Sometimes though, when I walked down the streets and looked at the faces of people scurrying by, I would get a feeling inside of fear. When I looked at some of the Indians around the skids, I got a sick feeling because all the faces

> locked so empty. Like they were dead people, walking fast to catch up with something I couldn't see (57).

This vision of the living death of his people, which is also a projection of his own, persists until he realizes the truth of the words in which a fellow activist sums it up as they march onward through "the Trial of Tears"; "We are going through these places where our people were killed and massacred to remind ourselves that our people are still being killed through a psychological warfare in some places and real physical warfare in others" (96-97). The physical warfare ie., the use of armed forces by the colonizer against the colonized, is evident, most of all in the scene in which government officials attempt to crush the native agitation by sending out the "riot squad" (101) to literally beat them back to submission.

Besides this kind of physical violence without any provocation to justify it, the dominant society is shown often in the novel to be guilty of moral violence as well. The kind of reception offered to the native activists, the leaders of the First Nations people, when they arrive in Washington is an instance in point. As one of the activists observes ;

> When leaders from other countries come to Washington they get the red carpet. Us Indians, our leaders are no different, they are the spokesmen of our nations. But we get the rat treatment and a bunch of people get pressured not to help out. And none of the meetings we asked for is set up [...]

> They won't even greet us in a civilized way, how in hell they gonna listen ? (101).

The result of such violence , actual and psychological, perpetrated on the victimized race is that the individual members of that race being unable to retaliate, often lash out in violence against their own people. This transfer of violence is illustrated by Armstrong in the knife-slashing scene which earns Tommy his nickname and initiates him into active political struggle (which provides a better outlet for his emotions though not yet the best) after he hits the rock bottom of degradation and dissipation. After tracing his endless and futile wandering through the cities and his life infested with long suppressed frustration, anger and hatred, Slash recalls: "one night everything came crashing around me" (57). And he goes on to narrate how he was attacked by a rival in drug-dealing and all his ineffectual rage found an outlet in blind violence:

> I can't say for sure what happened then, except that I hurt and I moved fast. The pain was like a big fog wrapped around me. The rest of me seemed to act on its own. I fuzzily remember a few scenes. Me slamming one of the guys, and a scared look on his face as he fell out the door. I remember the knife glittering in my hand and slashing at what seemed like forty people frozen into different poses [...] I remember cops and kicking one of them [...] and then nothing. (58)

in his semi conscious state caused by the wounds of his body and mind, besides the shock and confusion of the assault, 'Slash' is as unaware of his targets as he is of his real motives. He sees it as a "crashing down". But it is also a desperate attempt to restore equilibrium. It is a direct consequence of the long and unequal psychological warfare he and his people were subjected to.

Barbara Godard , who analyses the scene as symptomatic of the self hatred felt by colonized people due to ideological oppression, observes:

> What Tommy doesn't state, though the novel reveals ironically through his silence and his gestures, is that the colonized also lashes out in inexplicable violence which is self-violence. In one of his many outbursts of rage, Tommy earns his nickname 'slash'. Both his violence and his constant movement are the effect of self-hatred. (202)

In converting self-hatred to "self violence" Tommy's behaviour is typical of a number of people victimized by similar circumstances.

Mardi, one of the two main women characters in the novel is also presented as a victim of intra-racial violence. Her life is filled with all the trauma that native girls and women face in a racist sexist society such as parental neglect, alcoholism, sexual abuse, prostitution and physical

violence. Her description of her adult life is reminiscent of the experience of native girls like Nancy in Culleton's novel and the protagonist of Maria Campbell's Halfbreed as well as that of the many native women in US and Canada who are represented by these characters. She tells Slash:

> I got an old man when I was fourteen and we lasted about three years. Long enough for me to have two kids that welfare got. I guess I'm to blame for that too. But my old man was mean. He drank all the time and beat me a lot. I turned to the streets and picked up a habit. After we broke up I really hit the gutter. In about a year I was nearly dead. The only thing that helped me was I ended up in a rehab center for Indians [...].
>
> (61)

The story is typical, given, the racist sexist hierarchy in which she is placed, and the legacy of personal and communal self destruction handed down by the dominant society. As Lee Maracle points out :

> The busting up of communities, families, and the loss of the sense of nationhood and the spirit of cooperation among the colonized, are the aims of the colonizer. A sense of powerlessness is the legacy handed down to the colonized people for achievement of the aim of the colonizer. Loss of power--the negation of choice, legal and cultural victimization -- is the hoped for result. (120)

It is to resist such loss of power that Mardi, Slash and others turn to political agitation and cultural resistance.

It is true that the agitation of the native activists often turns violent in spite of their intention to protest and resist peacefully. But the novelist seems to imply that such violence is not only inevitable under the given circumstances but also necessary. Slash, for instance, yearns at one point for violence and bloodshed which, he hopes, would politicize the people as nothing else seems to be able to do. He recalls his participation in a peaceful occupation of the DIA office in Ottawa:

> AIM security was in place and there was drumming and all kinds of stuff done, but the seriousness and deadly kind of panic wasn't there. I knew that files and stuff were broken into. I didn't pay too much attention. I just didn't feel too much for what went on. I wanted violence. I wanted things to break and people to get crazy. (125 -26)

This desire can be accounted for partly by his own bitterness and frustration but it also reflects his conviction that some violence and panic is needed to bring the people together and to increase their political awareness and dynamism. A similar conviction is reflected in the opinion expressed by Slash's parents on violence during the agitation. Their views are conveyed to Slash in a letter from his sister:

> Pops and them, they don't say too much, but they think something is going to happen as far as violence is concerned. Pops and them said it was a long time coming but they hoped nobody would get too crazy. They said violence was sometimes needed when nobody listens, but It is needed now. Mostly to help Indian people wake themselves up more than to wake up the Whites. (73-74)

The violence therefore is as much a means to "wake" the people out of their mental paralysis and apathy as it is a manifestation of their wounded psyche. This is obvious from the narrative which resists the established conviction of the dominant society that it is a "rise in militancy" (159) and a threat to the 'civilized'society.

Nevertheless, the novelist does not condone or justify such acts of violence though she contextualises them. Her protagonist soon comes to the realization that "there was something wrong about the way that things were approached. It seemed like anything we built on anger and hatred was just as bad as what was being done to us" (160). It is only when Slash and his people turn to their own peace loving and tolerant tradition and resort to cultural and psychological resistance that they hit the right solution to heal themselves and to escape the evil effects of colonization.

Agnes Grant observes that Beatrice Culleton wrote April Raintree " so that she could finally come to terms with her personal history" (128); a history made traumatic by her parents' alcoholism, child neglect, incompetent and uncaring social workers, unsympathetic foster homes and experience of racial oppression with other attendant evils that lead ultimately to the suicide of her sisters. The novel therefore explores such issues and their effect on the native and Metis people through the experiences of April and Cheryl Raintree and violence is an inevitable part of that experience.

The earliest memories of the protagonist April as presented in her narrative are darkened by her parents' alcoholism and consequent moral deterioration that often results in domestic violence. Scarred by such experiences April, who is too young to comprehend their causes, concludes that they are some of the "grown-up things" that she "didn't understand"(8). But she recognizes them as undesirable. Describing a bout of such violence. She comments;

> To me this was all so confusing. I just knew that Mom shouldn't have kissed someone else; my Dad shouldn't have slept on the floor; and right now, Dad ought to be trying to protect Mom (from the woman who was fighting her), not finding the whole thing amusing. (4)

The neglect and the inability to take responsibility that she begins to perceive on the part of her parents at this point, leads ultimately to the separation of the two sisters from their parents.

April commits the mistake of attributing these scenes of violence among her people to their supposed racial inferiority even as Jimmy does in Slash. These characters, however, fail to realize the role of power and oppressive measures of the dominant society in producing such circumstances. The disintegration in the native community is often the result of the more than cultural difference that exists between them and the rest of the Canadian Society. As Emma LaRocque observes in an autobiographical essay:

> The real difference between native peoples and other Canadian people is no longer cultural so much as it is political. Native cultures have been inextricably related to land and resources. Euro-Canadian culture continues to invade these lands and resources, pulling the ground from under native cultures, creating a power/powerless relationship that generates results immensely more profound than mere cultural differences could ever create .
>
> ("Tides, Towns and Trains" 79)

April's failure to realize these facts and her inability to see through the politics of assimilation results in the distancing of her self from her people and the rejection of her Metis identity.

In its attempt to explore the psychological effects of colonialism and racist oppression , the novel stresses the role of emotional violence in the victimization of the two Metis sisters. Not only are they denied the emotional security and comfort of living with their parents but also kept apart from each other; at the orphanage under the threat of the whip, "I longed to go over to Cheryl and talk and play with her but I never dared to cross that invisible boundary" (10), and later at different foster homes under the pretext of thwarting what is defined as the evil influence they had on each other: "You girls have had a very bad influence on each other" (47), says the social worker, who comes to tear them apart after their desperate attempt to escape in order to stay together fails. It is a similar type of violence that Mrs. DeRosier, their foster mother uses against Cheryl to break her rebellious spirit and against April to break her morale. She recognizes the potency of emotional Blackmailing as a weapon when she succeeds in using it on Cheryl when the latter protests at school against the misrepresentation of her people in history books which in itself provides an instance of the violence of representation. Describing her little rebellion at school to April and Jennifer, Cheryl explains to them that the principal had called Mrs. DeRosier to handle her since he was unable to

silence her using the strap, and that when Mrs. DeRosier arrived she had the most potent weapon at hand:

> She told the principal she had nothing but trouble with Cheryl. He left her alone with Cheryl in his office. 'You are going to do exactly as they wish (she told Cheryl) or else, I will call your worker, have you moved and then I'll make sure you never see April again. Now, are you going to co-operate ?' Cheryl nodded meekly. The fight had gone out of her. (41)

Of the two sisters, Cheryl proves more vulnerable to such means of oppression even as she is easily provoked to retaliate physical and verbal violence.

April is less easy to provoke and therefore to subdue as she uses passive resistance which she recognizes as more effective than violent retaliation. This difference in their nature is obvious in their response to the other children on the school bus. April recalls:

> When school started in September, the DeRosier kids got the other kids on the bus to pick on Cheryl and me. Cheryl was easy to goad and she'd get into verbal exchanges of insults. It was impossible for me to convince her that was exactly what they wanted [...] I preferred the passive state I'd been in before Cheryl had come. I was worried that Cheryl would get

> into physical fights when I wasn't around. Fist fights were for people who couldn't keep their self-control. Further more they were undignified. (39-40)

The same conviction leads April to take refuge in silence and to converse only with the dog Rebel as a way to resist the verbal violence showered on her by the DeRosiers . As Ravichandra points out, in this reaction to the denial of linguistic space lies April's "secret language" which he defines as her "lost language" (77). Only once in the novel is April provoked to lash out in actual physical violence and that is when she discovers a trap set by the DeRosier kids to get Cheryl killed by a bull. Narrating the event April remembers her blind fury which resembles Tommy's rage in the knife-slashing scene in Armstrong's novel. After Cheryl is saved from the bull by Rebel, April lashes out against the DeRosier children:

> I motioned for Cheryl to leave things to me[...] Ricky and Maggie fought back and screamed bloody murder. I was silent as I ploughed into them. The fury in me wouldn't let their punches and their scratches hurt me . When my anger had subsided , I stepped back and looked at them with contempt. They were bloody and crying. (45)

The violence is as necessary for her as an outlet for long suppressed bitterness and frustration as it is for Slash besides being a result of the

unequal struggle each of them is forced to undertake as a prerequisite for survival in a racist society .

In presenting the different foster parents under whose care the Raintree girls grow up, Culleton has depicted the two aspects of the colonizer – colonized relationship: while people like the Steindalls, the Macadams , and the Dions typify the patronizing benevolent rulers, the DeRosiers manifest a hatred and contempt which are typical of the traditional attitude of the master race towards the vanquished. The DeRosiers therefore practice not only physical and verbal violence against April and Cheryl but are also guilty of moral violence in their attempt to degrade April and deprive her of human dignity. Mrs. DeRosier's plan to unsex April by making her wear unattractive clothes: "real old fashioned stuff" that earns her the title "Gramma squaw" (52), and by spreading rumours about her promiscuity (56-58) belong to this category of violence. April's effort to counter this scheme by writing her experiences in the form of a Christmas story, just like Cheryl's attempt to write down the Metis side of Canadian history, parallels the attempts of the novelist herself and other such writers to counter the violence of representation perpetrated against their people by the dominant discourse.

The more destructive acts of violence, both physical and psychological, are however experienced by the two sisters in their adult life rather than as the wards of the Children's Aid Society. April is punished for

her innocence and for her ignorance of her non-status role in a racist sexist society and of the impossibility of total assimilation into the mainstream. She must experience the violence of rape to realize that in spite of all her efforts she can never be "White" nor escape the stigma of the stereotyped squaw. Her rapists accuse her of the same promiscuity and perversion that the DeRosiers had charged her with. The leader asks her; "yeah, you little savages like it rough, eh? "(113) and then reports to his friends: "Hey, she likes this, boys. These squaws really dig this kind of action. They play hard to get and all the time they love it. You love this, don't you, you little squaw?" (114). This experience has a complex effect on her as it injures her in more than one way. The emotional crisis that she describes is but a part of the trauma though it is profound in itself. April recalls :

> I realized just how much I had suddenly learned to hate. It wasn't a natural emotion for me. I had known deep resentments but if I had been given choices, I would rather have been friends with people like the DeRosiers, mother Radcliff and Heather. But a real, cold, deep hatred had crept into me and I knew that I wouldn't want to let go of it, not for the rest of my life[...] I had been touched by evil and from now on it would always be a part of me. Wanting three men (the rapists) dead was evil in itself, but, nonetheless, I wanted them dead. (119)

Part of this consuming hatred is directed towards her own self and this accounts for the futility of her oft repeated ritual baths (which are the outward expressions of the self hatred and of her need to get rid of it) and for her inability to feel clean and whole inside. This hatred and the ineffectual yearning to retaliate with more violence: "to kill them and make their deaths prolonged and painful"(119), are debilitating. But such negative emotions appear to be the essential preludes to her final acceptance of her true identity towards the end of the novel even as Slash's self hatred and violent actions are an essential part of his quest for identity.

The latter part of Cheryl's life after her disillusionment about her parents, is more full of violence and destructive tendencies than that of April and her life at this stage conforms more or less to the well defined, stereotyped pattern of the native girl syndrome described earlier in the novel by the social worker Mrs.Semple. She presents it as the likely future to the Raintree girls:

> [A]nd you girls are headed in that direction. It starts out with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. There are the sullen uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourself . and when you on your own , you get pregnant right away or you can't find or keep jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there you get into shop lifting and prostitution

> and in and out of jails – you'll live with men who abuse you. And on it goes [...] now you are going the same route as many other native girls. If you don't smarten up, you'll end up in the same place. Skid row. (48-49)

Ironically, this pattern which outlines the native girl's reactions without attempting to comprehend her predicament is named and defined by the spokesperson of the very same (dominant) race which is responsible for that predicament. She, moreover, takes this pattern of behaviour for granted as the inevitable for the natives blocking out the possibility of alternative choices. It is tragic therefore that Cheryl's attempt to save herself and others from this trap fails and she herself falls a victim to it. Her journals reveal a life full of alcoholism, abuse, prostitution and violence all of which agree with the stereotyped pattern and her suicide is her desperate attempt to free herself from this pattern which she describes as "living death"(184).

Cheryl's verbal violence against April in the last phase of her life can also be read as her retaliation against the dominant race which, she convinces herself, is wholly responsible for creating the living death that she experiences. As Roger points out to April:

> Cheryl has identified with the Indian people and all the wrongs that have been done to them. And you, having identified with the White people, well, she's taken everything she's felt, out on you. Earlier when you told me the things she used to say

> when she was drunk, well, she wouldn't believe them herself when she was sober, I think , from what you've told me , Cheryl saw you in a typical white role. You supplied her with all her needs. You stayed in Winnipeg to help her, to be by her side. You've made her take handouts. (165)

To this projection of April as the surrogate White is added Cheryl's own guilt in giving up and April's implicit accusation against her as being responsible for her rape. All this lowers Cheryl's self-esteem and increases her destructive behaviour which culminates in self destruction. And the author seems to imply that such violence and destruction, which can be read as self violence since Cheryl symbolizes April's own rejected Metis alter ego, is an essential prelude to April's final transformation from the surrogate White, self conscious of her brown skinned sister, to the foster mother of Henry Lee , who dreams Cheryl's dreams and strives to make them come true.

While Jeannette Armstrong presents the struggles and violence in and around the life of her Okanagan protagonist, Beatrice Culleton splits the Metis predicament between the two Metis sisters and the implications of violence in her novel is more complex than that of Armstrong's work.

As a writer who was convinced that the very discourse used by the dominant race against her people involved a form of violence, Toni Morrison has attempted in her novels not only to depict the physical and other forms

of violence faced and internalized by the African-American people in her country but also to resist and sometimes subvert the violence of language and other forms of misrepresentation, exclusion and rejection used by the oppressor race against her people.

Her very first novel, The Bluest Eye, is an instance in point . The novelist's gesture of violating a Dick-and – Jane American primer in the beginning of the novel is as much of a counter-thrust against the violence of language and representation implicit in it, as it is an indicator of the major theme in the novel ie., the inadequacy and inappropriateness of White values and standards to determine the life and behaviour of Black Americans. The primer which begins with the description of a 'pretty' house, "Here is the house. It is green and White . It has a red door. It is pretty" presents a typical White middle class family ie., mother, father dick and Jane along with their pet dog, cat and a friend who comes to play with Jane , in an idealized situation. The mother is nice and is laughing the father is strong and smiling, the children play and all of them are "happy". It is repeated twice with the punctuations and spaces removed. The purpose of this violation is made clear when the author repeats some of these distorted lines to introduce some of the chapters in the novel . The chapter that presents the cheerless and oppressive store front home of the Breedloves for instance, is introduced with the line:

HEREISTHEHOUSEITISGREENANDWHITEITHASAREDDOORITIS VERYPRETTYITISVERYPRETTYPRETTYPRETTYP. (24)

And then in sharp contrast;

> There is an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio. It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and Black telephone poles around it. Rather, it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and Melancholy. (24)

The bright colours in the Primer line is contrasted with the gray and Black of the passage and the notion of pretty house is opposed by the idea of disharmony. It is significant that the word pretty from the primer is repeated many times and is finally broken up at the initial letter as the concept of prettiness, as determined by the White society which the primer represents, proves itself the most potent weapon that victimizes the inhabitants of the storefront who, like their surroundings, do not fit the description. So also, each aspect of the world of the primer is confronted by its counterpart from the world of the Black Americans under duress.

Similarly, the gesture of giving the centre stage in the novel to children, and Black female children at that, is another act of appropriation by the novelist who thereby challenges the mainstream literature of denial and

marginalisation. Here, Toni Morrison goes a step further than the appropriation of the first person narrative by the native Indian, Metis voice found in the novels of Armstrong and Culleton. As L.E.Sissman, an early reviewer of the novel sums up "Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye couldn't be more different. She is dealing with children, not men; she is dealing with the forties, not the present; she is dealing with the Black subculture, not the military one" (4).

The Bluest Eye presents with startling clarity the instances of psychological as well as Physical and Verbal violence borne by Black American children as they grow up in a racially prejudiced society. As Claudia who narrates a part of the novel sums up: "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major fold of the garment" (11). And this peripheral existence of her people provided little protection to the children from any kind of violence. Pecola Breedlove who proves to be the most victimized character in the novel, for instance receives an early shock of psychological violence as she is forced to witness the formalized but persistent fights between her parents. The narrator of this part of the tale contrasts the responses of the two Breedlove children to these bouts of domestic violence:

> There was a difference in the reaction of the children to these battles. Sammy cursed for a while, or left the house, or threw

> himself in to the fray. He was known, by the time he was fourteen to have run away from home no less than twenty-seven times[...] Pecola, on the other hand, restricted by youth and sex, experimented with methods of endurance. Though the methods varied, the pain was as consistent as it was deep. She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one (of her parents) would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die. (32)

The scene that occasions these remarks resembles another in Culleton's novel where the child April witnesses the drunken fights and domestic chaos at home while she lives with her parents. But unlike the reactions, such as fear and shock at the moment and contempt and a desire to reject her people in retrospect, which are provoked in April by the experience, the effect produced on Pecola is profound . Her death –wish which manifests itself in her prayer: "Please, God, [...] Please make me disappear" (33) soon changes into a desire for transformation epitomized in her yearning for blue eyes: "It had occurred to Pecola sometime ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights (of domestic violence and universal discrimination) - if these eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (34).

The psychic wound caused in the young child by the early shock of domestic disharmony is enhanced in the course of the novel by more

violence heaped on her by the racist, sexist society in which she grows up. The moral violence in the suspended glance of the immigrant storekeeper. "the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge [...] The total absence of human recognition" (36), the verbal violence of her schoolmates who call her "Black e Mo" because

> [t]hey seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds. (50)

and were prepared for their own sake to sacrifice her to the "flaming pit" (50), and finally the physical violence of being raped by her own father, who was himself a victim of psychic confusion, completes the disintegration of Pecola's mental balance. And as Claudia realizes at the end of the novel: "The damage done was total" (162).

Pecola's role as a communal scapegoat implies another type of violence ie., that perpetrated by the community on its victim for self preservation. In Claudia's richly imaginative but earnest confession is embedded this retrospective insight:

> All of us all who knew her – felt wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride

> her ugliness, her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous .Even her waking dreams we used –to silence our own nightmares. And she let us and thereby deserved our contempt. (163)

Claudia tries to escape the implications of this awareness by avoiding Pecola and eventually transferring the blame to the land itself:

> This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. (164).

But even this attitude is fringed with the knowledge that the guilt as well as her attempt to escape from it have all been too late. But although the community uses Pecola's disintegration for its own purposes, the role of White ideology and racist oppression in bringing about that disintegration cannot be under rated. Claudia's summation in the last chapter reveals as much "A little Black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little White girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (162). The horror and the evil result undoubtedly from the pursuit of an unattainable and undesirable ideal imposed by the dominant society.

Other characters such as Cholly and Pauline Breedlove, victimized by the same ideology and similar oppression, respond in characteristic ways. Cholly Breedlove , "whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed towards petty things and weak peoples) was behavior"(29), degrades himself steadily until the very remembrance of the humiliations and emasculations in his life could "stir him into flights of depravity that surprised himself –but only himself"(32). It is against this psychological context that the novelist places Cholly's violence against his daughter. The complex sequence of his emotions at the time are listed as "revulsion, guilt, pity then love" (127). Revulsion, as the novelist goes on to say, is Cholly's reaction to the hopeless, helpless, presence of his daughter and the realization that "the clear statement of her misery was an accusation" (127). The feeling is akin to that experienced by Claudia herself when she witnessed the inarticulate misery of her friend in an earlier scene : "She (Pecola) seemed to fold into herself like a pleated wing. Her pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets" (51). But to Cholly this feeling also implies guilt and anger at his own inadequacy as a parent and at the undeserved expression of love he has seen in the child's eyes:

> How dare she love him? [...] what was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? what could his calloused hands produce to make her smile ? [...] what could his heavy arms

> and befuddled brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love? (127)

and all of these emotions dissolve into pity and tenderness. But his injured and perverted psyche translates tenderness into lust and protectiveness in to violence. It is significant that the novelist describes as many positive emotions as the negative ones during her analysis of the workings of Cholly's mind. Claudia's comment "(H)e (Cholly) at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her. But his touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death" (163) reveals a similar combination of positive and negative. The intention of course is not to condone the outrageous crime, which is condemned by the whole community. But rather to point out the problematic nature of any response, however criminal, evoked from a people subject to ages of systematic and endless oppression, and also to warn the reader against a simplistic verdict that might encourage misrepresentation and confirm the myth of innate depravity and communal perversion.

The violence within the domestic life of the Breedloves and the oppression outside their threshold, which drives Cholly into such psychic confusion, leads Pauline to adopt the self-assumed role of the martyr, "Holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of

thorns, and her children like a cross" (98) and finally finds refuge in the role of an ideal servant not unlike that of the stereotyped Black Mammy.

The presence of so much violence in the novel ie., violence committed against the Black American community as well as the transferred violence within the community, points to the profound impact of ideological domination. The concept of Blackness in the novel is more of a social construct than a biological one: a construct partly of the characters' own making (as is the conviction of the Breedloves), but mostly based on White definition of Blackness (fostered by Shirly Temples and Mary Janes as well as by Maureen Peals and Geraldines in the American society) which associates it with violence, poverty dirt and ignorance.

What distinguishes this Black American novel, however is the fact that it also manifests the counter violence of subversion. Besides the violated primer which informs the very structure of the novel , the reactions of Claudia to the duress of the racist environment in which she grows up provides an instance. She responds to the imputed superiority of the European ideals of beauty with a destructive impulse that urges her to deconstruct the evil literally to its root. She obeys the urge by dismembering White dolls " To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me" (14) because "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, news papers window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow haired, pink-

skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (14) . But the desire for exploratory violence is soon transferred from the symbol to the original:

> But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little White girls. The indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so. To discover what eluded me, the secret of the magic they weaved on others. (15)

It takes a complex adjustment for her psyche to suppress this repulsive desire for disinterested violence and to bring about "the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love"(15) so that she is able to love the Shirley Temples of society along with the rest of her contemporaries.

The same subversive tendency is evident in Claudia's concern for Pecola's unborn baby. The emphasis of its physical beauty in her imagination is her counter thrust against the Euro -American standards and criteria of beauty:

> I thought about the baby that everybody wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark wet place, its head covered with great O's of wool, its Black face holding , like nickels, two clean Black eyes, the flared nose, kissing - thick lips, and the

> living, breathing silk of Black skin [...] I felt a need for someone to want the Black baby to live - just to counteract the universal love of White baby dolls, Shirley Temples and Maureen Peals. (149)

Through these gestures of self assertion and exploration attributed to Claudia, the novelist attempts to probe how the western culture "inspires hatred toward and among people of African descent, inducing destructive behaviour and an equally adverse disconnection from anything not western" (Braxton and Mclaughlin 170). And though the true source of the evil is not revealed to Claudia immediately, though she is not able to discover "how and why Black people are being devoured" (Morrison in LeClair 17) which according to the novelist is what the very structure of the novel explores, these diffident acts of asserting her preferences enables Claudia and the like to survive and resist more effectively the oppressive discourse that dominates their lives. The violence involved in Claudia's behaviour therefore, like the novelist's violation of the Dick and Jane Primer, is as fructifying and productive as the dimly remembered pain of Claudia's childhood days.

Even as she violates an American Primer in The Bluest Eye in order to undermine the White American standards and values imposed on the African American people, Toni Morrison appropriates a traditional Euro-American narrative pattern in the Song of Solomon to subvert the

supremacy of the Euro-centric ideals and view of life. The novelist here utilizes, as Linden Peach points out, the framework of the 19th century romances, so popular in America and Europe, but at the same time gives predominance to an Afro centric vision of life. And the purposes served by the instances of violence in this novel are more varied than those in The Bluest Eye.

Like Armstrong's Slash and the traditional White American romances, Song of Solomon presents the quest of the hero; his journey and his adventures and the influence asserted by his friends and foes. And, as Peach comments:

> It has features in common with nineteenth-century American romances: it works with myth, folklore and ritual; and it involves anti-rational structures and levels of meaning. But many of the mythological and folklore elements come from Africa. And the anti-rational elements [...] arise from an African, and hence African-American ontology. (56)

This appropriation of the Euro-American tradition to bring out the African-American values and vision is the novelist's response to the violence of representation used against Black Americans in mainstream literature.

Mingwon Mingwon (Shirly Bear), the American Indian writer, observes analyzing the typical responses to racist oppression:

> Racial superiority expresses itself when one race of people feel that they can dominate another race of people. When people are powered over, it always results in either transferring this dominance over others less powerful than themselves or indignation on being powered over. (135)

The critic adds that those who are indignant try to rectify the inequality in which ever way they can while those who transfer dominance to others less powerful, only succeed in promoting the inequality. Both these types of behaviour are represented in Morrison's novel and they involve varying degrees of violence. Characters such as Guitar and Circe, like Slash and Cheryl in the two Canadian novels, belong to the indignant type though their retaliation against inequality involves violence and perversion. While Macon Dead and his son Milkman before his journey of self discovery represent the type of people who like Cholly Breedlove, transfer dominance (and violence) to others weaker than themselves.

Embittered by the death of his father and the humiliating submission of his mother before the White master, Guitar grows up indignant about the "slave status" (160) of his people. But political awareness leads him to fanatic perversion which culminates in his association with the secret society of the Seven Days. The nature of its operation savours of disinterested violence: As Guitar explains,

> When a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by Whites and nothing is done about it by their law and their courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can [...] If they can't do it precisely in the same manner, they do it any way they can, but they do it. They call themselves the Seven Days. (155)

They work on the assumption that the White race as a whole is unnatural which is an ironic inversion of the colonialist notion that the dark races are savage and degenerate by nature. Guitar justifies their work on the ground of the absence of justice in America. When Milkman suggests that they should hand over their victim to the law as the Jews do with the Nazis. Guitar retorts:

> You say Jews try their catches in a court. Do we have a court? Is there one court house in one city in the country where a jury would convict them? There are places right now where a Negro still can't testify against a White man. Where the judge, the jury, the court, are legally bound to ignore anything a Negro has to say, what that means is that a Black man is a victim of a crime only when a White man says he is. Only then. If there was anything like or near justice or courts when a cracker kills a Negro , there wouldn't have to be no Seven Days. But there ain't ; so we are . (161)

This desire to take up violence for justice is paralleled in Slash where the protagonist yearns for violence rather than political inaction in an early phase of his quest. But unlike Slash who outgrows this phase and proceeds to adopt more positive methods of resistance, Guitar and the other Days, who persist in their mission of keeping the racial ratio evenly balanced, become as unjust and relentless as the "unnatural enemy" (157) that they attempt to overcome . As Milkman points out to Guitar, "What you are doing is crazy. And something else : its a habit. If you do it enough, you can do it to anybody. You know what I mean ? A torpedo is a torpedo. I don't care what his reasons. You can off anybody you don't like. You can off me" (161-62). This prediction is fulfilled as the nature of his 'work' and the disappointment due to their inability to find the gold- unhinges Guitar's mind and he turns against Milkman.

While protest against injustice drives Guitar to violence, it leads Circe to resist with resilience. Her brand of revenge against her White masters for the murder of Macon Dead I and for all the oppression they practiced takes the form of a determination to outlast them and to watch their beloved mansion go to ruins. The success of her conviction is proved by Reverent Cooper's words to Milkman, "Things work out, son. The ways of God are mysterious, but if you live it out, just live it out, you see that it always works out. Nothing they (the White people for whom Circe worked) stole or killed for did'em a bit a good. Not one bit." (234). And Circe herself explains her

intention to Milkman when he accuses her of being loyal to her masters and taking care of their property even after their death:

> They loved this place [...] they loved it, stole for it, lied for it, killed for it. But I'm the one left. Me and the dogs. And I will never clean it again. Never. Nothing. Not a speck of dust, not a grain of dirt will I move. Everything in this world they lived for will crumble and rot [...] And I want to see it all go . (249)

And though the novelist does not overtly privilege Circe's method of protest against that of Guitar, she does present other alternatives than lashing out in counter-violence.

Besides these characters who react against inequality and are sometimes lead into violence as the means of protest, the novel presents those who transfer dominance to others less powerful and become guilty of violence in the process. Macon Dead Jr., who responds to the brutal murder of his father by White men who coveted his land, by outdoing them in their own game of acquisition and ownership, functions as the prototype of such characters in the novel. That in part accounts for the absence of peace in their home, "The quiet that suffused the doctor's house then, broken only by the murmur of the women eating sunshine cake, was only that: quiet. It was not peaceful, for it was preceded by and would soon be terminated by the presence of Macon Dead" (10). The result of his oppression, its impact on

the two young girls is hinted at by Magdalene when she accuses her brother Milkman of inheriting the same oppressive behaviour:

> You are exactly like him (their father Macon) exactly. I didn't go to college because I was afraid of what he might do to mama. You think because you hit him once that we all believe you were protecting her. Taking her side. It's a lie. You were taking over, letting us know you had the right to tell her and all of us what to do. (217)

Besides the oppression of his wife and daughters which he shares with his son, Macon Dead Jr., is also guilty of moral violence in his refusal to reconcile himself with his sister (who is not respectable according to his acquired standards), and in his utter ruthlessness as a landlord. The complete lack of pity and understanding with which he expels Mrs. Bains and her orphaned grandchildren from their home, is a measure of his moral violence against the community from which he has alienated himself in pursuit of material success. All this along with his verbal and physical violence against Ruth (sometimes spontaneous and at other times as a result of deliberate provocation by Ruth as a part of her own vengeance not unlike that of Pauline in The Bluest Eye) are instances of his attempt to transfer dominance; he tries to compensate the inferior position imposed upon him by the White racist society by means of transferring the oppression on to women and children who are less privileged than himself

in a patriarchal family, and to other Black people economically less privileged than himself.

The outburst of intra-racial violence as a result of oppression and the transfer of dominance is in fact an important theme in Morrison's novels and a concern common to all three novelists under study. Guitar's words to Milkman in this novel for instance, resembles Slash's comments in Armstrong's novel. Guitar warns his friend:

> People do funny things, specially us. The cards are stacked against us and just trying to stay in the game, stay alive and in the game, makes us do funny things. Things we can't help. Things that make us hurt one another. We don't even know why. But look here, don't carry it inside and don't give it to nobody else. Try to understand it, but if you can't, just forget it and keep yourself strong, man. (88)

The fact that guitar himself fails to follow his own advice not to "hurt one another" or "give it to nobody else", lends his argument its weight.

Ruth uses more complicated methods than those used by her husband to get even with him. She does not need to employ direct violence and she resembles Circe in this respect. Her method of revenge against Macon who, she believes, is responsible for her father's death, is to provoke violence and brutality rather than to commit violence herself. She creates

subtle situations aimed at the tender spot in his psyche so that he cannot resist reacting in some form of violence. Describing one such scene where Ruth begins by narrating a simple anecdote involving her own ignorance and embarrassment in a Catholic church, the omniscient narrator comments:

> It was a simple occurrence, elaborately told. Lena listened and experienced each phrase of her mother's emotion [...] Corinthians listened analytically, expectantly wondering how her mother would develop this anecdote into a situation in which Macon would either lash out at her verbally or hit her.
>
> (66)

Ruth goes on to say that she escaped the embarrassing situation in the church because she was Dr. Foster's daughter. The possessive fondness in her voice and manner as she says it is enough to remind Macon of what he suspected to be her incestuous attachment to her father. Thus she succeeds in bringing her husband "to a point, not of power [...] but of helplessness" (64) which compels him to hit her even as their daughter Corinthians expected. This method of provoking violence and helplessness in her husband also enables her to procure the sympathy of at least two of her children ie., Lena who stays at home to protect her from him (217), and Milkman who knocks his father down in the moment of rage after his mother had been hit (67).

Milkman's gesture of violence against his father, however has other implications than mere revenge on behalf of his mother. It signals the coming of age of the traditionally conceived hero in keeping with initiation rites in traditional quest narratives, the pattern and framework of which Morrison has appropriated in this novel. The symbolic significance of this act of literally overpowering his father, is hinted at by the narrator while describing the contradictory emotions felt by the father and son after the event:

> Just as the father brimmed with contradictory feelings as he crept along the wall--humiliation, anger and a grudging feeling of pride in his son--so the son felt his own contradictions. There was the pain and shame of seeing his father crumple before any man--even himself. Sorrow in discovering that the pyramid was not a five--thousand--year--wonder of the civilized world--He also felt glee. A snorting-horse–galloping glee as old as desire. He had won something and lost something in the same instant. (68)

And though this act is not immediately followed by the quest it does lead the hero into much introspection and results in the realization that his self and personality lacks coherence. This awareness is an essential prerequisite for his journey into self knowledge.

Song of Solomon deals more with the political events of the time than most other novels by Morrison and references to atrocities suffered by Black people in the predominantly racist American Society and violence due to inter-racial hostility are inevitable in such a novel, apart from the reference to the murder of Emmet Till, the killing of four girls in a church, the humiliation of Black soldiers after the first World war and other such events, the novelist presents numerous instances of violence either experienced or witnessed by the characters themselves. And in some cases she presents the attempt of the Black people to come to terms with these acts of violence and oppression by recreating them by means of narrative transformations into self effacing humour. Presenting a group of southside Negroes engaged in a heated discussion about the murder of Till and its consequences and about the absence of justice, the narrator goes on to describe such an attempt by the people:

> The men began to trade tales of atrocities, first atrocities they had heard then those they'd witnessed, and finally the things that had happened to themselves. A litany of personal humiliation, outrage and anger turned sickle like back to themselves as humour. They laughed then, uproariously, about the speed with which they had run, the pose they had assumed, the ruse they had invented to escape or decrease some threat to their manliness, their humanness. (83)

This process of narrative transformation resembles the effort of the old Black women in The Bluest Eye who repeat the litany of painful experiences in their lives to each other in order to recreate them on their own terms.

The last scene of the novel also involves a similar but more significant transformation of violence by means of the narrative. The murderous shots that signal the final encounter between Milkman and Guitar soon after the burial of Macon Dead I, is presented in such a way in the narrative that the resulting violence is transformed into an act of liberation , first for Pilate because "without ever leaving the ground, she could fly "(340), and then for Milkman:

> As fleet and bright as a lodestar he wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar (Solomon, his legendary ancestor) knew; if you surrendered to the air, you could ride it. (341)

Though Milkman's 'flight' has been interpreted as suicide or escapism, the general tone of the passage is triumphant rather than desperate. Besides, the idea of flight is associated with liberty rather than destruction in the novel. The transformation at the end of the novel therefore is a positive one.

Tar Baby, Morrison's next novel is unique not only because the author explores the lives and minds of White people as well as Blacks, but also due to the fact that she presents the landscape and nature as fully animate and capable of participating in the action of the novel. As the novelist herself has pointed out in an interview:

> It's an animated world in which trees can be outraged and hurt, and in which the presence or absence of birds is meaningful. You have to be very still to understand these so-called-signs, in addition to which they inform you about your own behaviour. (Ruas 223)

This comment about her vision of life is truer of the world in Tar Baby than in most other novels. It is significant therefore that she emphasizes at the outset the violation of nature in the Caribbean island before the arrival of the White settlers. The description of the violence suffered by nature preceeds the exploration of the guilt and innocence and crime and violence in the lives of the different characters:

> When laborers imported from Haiti came to clear the land, clouds and fish were convinced that the world was over [...] Wild parrots that had escaped the stones of hungry children in Queen of France agreed and raised havoc [...] Only the champion daisy trees were serene [...] It took the river to persuade them that indeed the world was altered [...] The

> men had already folded the earth where there had been no fold and hollowed her where there had been no hollow, which explains what happened to the river. It crested, then lost its course, and finally its head [...] Poor insulted , brokenhearted river. Poor demented stream. Now it sat in one place like a grandmother and became a swamp the Haitians called Sein de Vieilles. (Tar Baby 7-8)

The narrator furnishes more details about the "scatterbrained river" and the "nightmare mutterings" of trees (8) which not only forbade and symbolize but also supplement the restless alienation in which most of the characters live. The flora and fauna of the island are indeed "alive, whispering, murmuring, nodding their commentaries on the stories that are being played out in the dazzling sun" as Maureen Howard (17) puts it.

The conquest of the land as part of colonization, the devastation of nature's harmony and its consequences are themes repeated by the two Canadian novelists as well. Slash's comments in Armstrong's novel and Cheryl's speech in Culleton's fiction reveal the cultural and material loss sustained by their people as a result of such violation.

Each of the characters in Tar Baby has a history when the novel begins, "Quite a complete history that is given to us in a series of stunning performances" (Howard 17). And much of it is centered around some form

of guilt and violence. Valerian Street the White capitalist is described by Morrison herself as the centre of the action in the novel though he is not the protagonist because "he certainly is the center of the world. I mean, Whitemen run it. He is the center of the household - - toppled, perhaps, but still the center of everybody's attention - - and that's pretty much the way it is" (Ruas 225). It is true that he is presented as a "rather nice man" (Ruas 225) and a benevolent employer and patron but he is also described later in the novel as "one of the killers of the world" (175) from son's perspective. This connects him and his class to the earlier description of the violence perpetrated on nature. And when Valerian announces the dismissal of two Black servants on the charge of stealing apples, son ruminates on the moral violence involved in this action :

> Son's mouth went dry as he watched Valerian chewing a piece of ham , his head –of-a -coin profile content, approving even of the flavour in his mouth although he had been able to dismiss with a flutter of the fingers the people whose sugar and cocoa had allowed him to grow old in regal comfort; although he had taken the sugar and cocoa and paid for it as though it had no value as though the cutting of cane and picking of beans was child's play and had no value; [...] and when these people wanted a little of what he wanted , some apples for their Christmas; and took some, he dismissed them with a flutter of the fingers, because they were thieves. (174)

It is his awareness of the complete injustice of the situation, besides the bitterness caused by Jadine's devotion to her patron, that emboldens Son to question the authority of the Candy-king at his own dinner table .

Another aspect of Valerian's guilt is revealed after the climactic scene in which he discovers the unnatural crime and guilt of his wife which had haunted their lives for years. He is made to realize that he is not free of guilt though not directly responsible for the child-abuse practiced by Margaret upon their son. Valerian's innocence itself becomes his guilt in this instance. The narrator sums up his thoughts which contain this insight:

> And there was something so foul in that, something in the crime of innocence so revolting, it paralyzed him. He had not known (that his little son was abused) because he had not taken the trouble to know. He was satisfied with what he did know. Knowing more was inconvenient and frightening [...] he was guilty therefore of innocence. Was there anything so loathsome as a willfully innocent man? Hardly : an innocent man is a sin before God. Inhuman and therefore unworthy.
>
> (209)

the sin of innocence here, which involves a kind of insensitivity, a refusal to see the obviously perceptible, becomes a form of moral violence capable of paralyzing the person who is guilty of it.

Margaret Street is presented by the novelist as a victim as well as the perpetrator of violence. Like most of the other characters in the novel she represents a typical White woman under certain circumstances. Her youth and beauty as the principal beauty of Maine leads to her marriage with Valerian at the age of seventeen. But then she is pressed small by the vast but lonely mansion where she lives far away from her land and people . Her response to the loneliness however is not typical. She resorts to wounding her baby in order to survive the uneventfulness of her life, and to limit "that infant needfulness" of her child which demanded the best of her attention. The extend of her perversion is obvious as she realizes the impossibility of explaining it away to her husband after the secret had been revealed by Ondine:

> So there was no way or reason to describe those long quiet days when the sun was drained and nobody ever on the street [...] it started on a day like that. Just once she did it, a slip, and then once more, and it became the thing to look forward to, to resist, to succumb, to plan, to be horrified by, to forget, because out of the doing of it came the reason. And she was outraged by that infant needfulness. There were times when she also absolutely had to limit it's being there; stop its implicit and explicit demand for her best and constant self. (203)

Her reaction to her only son is therefore complicated. Besides maternal love she also feels an uncontrollable loathing for the baby's "prodigious appetite for security -- the criminal arrogance of an infant's conviction that while he slept, someone is there; and when he wakes, someone is there; that when he is hungry, food will somehow be magically provided" (203) and when she feels like a "hostage to that massive insolence, that stupid trust" (204) of the infant, she cannot resist piercing it by sticking pins in the baby's flesh or by burning his skin. But when Michael grows up and leaves his parents, her feelings change to guilt and a desire to over-compensate by following him across the world and waiting nervously for his constantly postponed homecoming.

Margaret's response when her crime is finally discovered by her husband and the others, is also significant. While Valerian is shocked and devastated by the revelation, Margaret emerges stronger and more serene than ever, understands his grief and even tries to comfort him. The voice of the omniscient narrator explains:

> The wonderful relief of public humiliation, the solid security of the pillory, were upon her. Like the much-sought- after, finally captured , strangler, she wore that look of harmony that in newspaper photos, comes across as arrogance, or impenitence at the least. The harmony that comes from the relieved discovery that the jig is up. (202)

The psychological realism of this analysis is an indicator of the author's insight into character and her deep understanding of human behaviour in general. Through the depiction of Margaret's psychic perversion, the novelist seems to remind the reader that all such perversions are the result of circumstantial pressures and the conditions of human existence rather than the inherent distortion of a particular race, as is often supposed by the advocates of the racial superiority of the Whites .

The role played by Ondine, the Black servant who loved her employer's child as her own and kept her lady's secret though she hated her, is equally complex. Ondine witnesses Margaret's acts of violence against her baby and hates her bitterly, convinced that the White woman is a freak unworthy to be a woman and a mother. Nevertheless she does not reveal the secret to any one until the moment of uncontrollable fury when she finally accuses Margaret of being unnatural . The reasons for this behaviour are not clear to Ondine herself . This is evident from the different ways in which she tries to account for it. When Margaret, at a later stage in the novel, asks her way she did not tell anyone about it, she confesses:

> There was nobody to tell, it was woman stuff. I couldn't tell your husband and I couldn't tell mine[...] I guess I thought you would let us go. If I told Sydney, he might tell Mr.Street and then we'd be out of a job -- a good job. I don't know what I thought, to tell the truth. But once I started keeping it -- then it

> was like my secret too. Sometimes I thought if you all let me go there won't be anyone around to take the edge off it. I didn't want to leave him (the baby) there all by himself. (207)

The novelist however had clearly conceived this character in the role of an accomplice as well as a witness and the keeper of Margaret's secret. This is obvious from Morrison's comments to Charles Ruas when he raises the issue of the complicity of the two women in the novel being stronger than hatred:

> It's my view that one of the things that Black women were able to do in many situations was to make it possible for White women to remain infantile. Margaret has been thoroughly crippled by her husband, who kept her that way, and Ondine helped. In a sense, such women are not innocent victims, but they really are victims of a kind of giant romantic stupidity.
>
> (Ruas 227)

Apart from her complicity in keeping Margaret infantile and sharing her guilt of child abuse, Ondine (like Sydney) is also guilty of moral violence. As the ideal servants of Valerian, Sydney and Ondine distance themselves from the other Black servants and the natives of the island . The extend of their moral alienation is evident from their refusal to know the names of Gideon and Therese, calling them yardman and Mary respectively as their employers do. Their reactions to Son are also symptomatic of their

conviction that they belong to a superior class. Like many other illusions, this conviction is also exploded by the presence of Son which forces everyone to redefine their roles. The two Black people are punished further by Jadine's desertion of them in the end.

Son who plays the intruder , like the trickster rabbit in the folktale of the tar baby, violates the apparently well established peace and harmony of L'Arbe de la cruix and reveals the turmoil, restlessness and guilt hidden just below the smooth surface of every day intercourse. But Son is himself revealed to be guilty of violence from his past life. On the run due to the accidental but violent murder of his unfaithful wife, Son's response to his crime is more positive than that of Margaret. Like Pilate in Song of Solomon he takes responsibility for the deed, "I didn't want their punishment, I wanted my own"(147), and even feels regret for his lack of empathy for his victim:

> While he could not regret the fact that she (his wife) was dead, he was ashamed of not having been able to look her in the eyes as she died. She deserved that. Everybody deserved that. That somebody look at them, with them, as they face death--especially the killer. But he had not had the courage or the sympathy and it shamed him. (150)

And even as Pilate wanders with the bones of the dead man (for whose death she holds herself responsible) as a form of self-punishment, Son roams all alone to punish himself and mitigate his own degradation..

Apart from the violence involved in crimes attributed to different characters, the novel deals with violence as a means of instruction or moral awakening. The violent exposure of the classist hypocrisy of Sydney and Ondine and the fabled invulnerability of Valerian and his family, by the sudden appearance of Son in their midst is an instance in point. The reaction of the African woman who awakens Jadine's sense of in authenticity also belongs to this category of fructifying violence. Jadine is fascinated by the transcendent beauty of the woman-in-yellow when she meets her in Paris, though her unphotographable loveliness does not fit any of the standards of beauty by which Jadine herself has succeeded as a model. But the woman is not the least impressed by the lovely Jadine:

> [A]nd there, just there--a moment before the cataclysm (of the woman leaving the store), when all loveliness and life and breath in the world was about to disappear--the woman turned her head sharply around to the left and looked right at Jadine. Turned those eyes too beautiful for eyelashes on Jadine and, with a small parting of her lips shot an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement and the hearts below. (39)

With this simple gesture of spitting at Jadine, the woman subverts all the cherished ideals which had lead Jadine to success and drives her out of Paris inspite of the admiration and fame she had earned there. The African beauty effectively "invalidates the marvelously successful Jadine" as Barbara Christian has pointed out in a review of the novel (67). The behaviour of the night women of Eloe who threaten and Judge Jadine in a vision is also instructive in the same way. All the Black women in Jadine's life and those she met or heard about in Eloe crowd in her bedroom in the vision and when she asks them what they wanted.

> They looked as though they had just been waiting for that question and they each pulled out a breast and showed it to her. Jadine started to tremble. They stood around in the room, jostling each other gently, gently--there wasn't much room--revealing one breast and then two and Jadine was shocked.
>
> (222)

The symbolic significance of their action is obvious. The women wished to remind Jadine that their femininity and the ability to nurture have been their identity; their true and ancient property which she has deserted due to her pursuit of material success. The vision represents Jadine's awareness of her own inauthenticity caused by the dominant discourse that she had internalized at the expense of communal values and even the gender solidarity that the women enjoyed. The scene reveals Jadine's guilt as well as her escape from it.

It is from this inauthenticity that Therese, the nurturer–prophet myth teller, wants to protect Son at the end of the novel. The blind Black woman takes Son to the wrong side of the island and commands him to choose the mythical riders hidden in the woods rather than the life offered by Jadine. This richly ambiguous action has been interpreted as a treacherous death trap laid for the hero. But as in Song of Solomon the last lines of the novel suggests liberation ie., the escape of the rabbit into the briar patch.

The functions of violence in Toni Morrison's Beloved is perhaps the most varied and complex because this novel deals with the experience of slavery which is based not only on the ownership and possession of human beings but also on the deliberate and relentless attempt of the owners to dehumanize those whom they owned and possessed. The violence suffered by the victims of slavery as well as the violence they perpetrate on themselves and the prize they must pay for it form inevitable themes of the novel. Besides these, the narrative itself embodies the violence that it represents. The opening passage of the novel which conveys the reader's imagination rather violently into a house brimful of disharmony and the violence of the dead is an example:

> 124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby

> Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Bulgar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old.

The significance of thus plunging the reader headlong into the nervous excitement in a haunted house without any preparatory comments has been pointed out by the novelist herself:

> The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense [...] And the house into which the snatching--this kidnapping--propels one, changes from spiteful to loud to quiet, as the sounds in the body of the ship (which brought the slaves) itself may have changed [...]
>
> (quoted from Smith 349)

And as Valerie Smith points out, these comments indicate the novelist's desire to make the reader self-conscious of the process of reading so that "our experience of the text becomes an analogy for the slave's sense of dislocation" (349). In addition to this, the representation of violence and the violence of representation merge finely in this narrative.

The significance of Beloved as a narrative on slavery with a difference has been commented upon by several critics. Bernard Bell for instance, calls it a womanist neo-slave narrative[2] while Barbara Schapiro observes that "Toni Morrison's Beloved penetrates, perhaps more deeply than any historical or psychological study could, the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery" (194). And to do so effectively the novel explores some of the worst atrocities suffered by the 'sixty million and more' Black Americans for whom it is dedicated. Attention is drawn from the start to the unspeakable misery of slave life. The torture and humiliation, the separation of the children from mothers and of women and children from the men, the treatment of slaves as beasts of burden, sexual exploitation of the women and many other forms of subtle but systematic degradation and dehumanization are explored in terms of their impact on the victims. Most of the characters who escape from slavery or find freedom in some other way, have to pay beyond proportion to that system. Like Joshua who renames himself Stamp Paid because he is convinced that he has paid his debt to misery, the sacrifices they offer up out weigh the designations of value assigned to them by the system.

In exchange for her successful journey into freedom Sethe must endure the mutilation of her body which is 'marked' with a tree, the death of her daughter, the loss of her sons, her husband's insanity and the revenge of a ghost. Paul D must pay his share in misery and survive the sale of one brother, the death of another, the bit in his mouth and imprisonment. Sixo

pays with his life and Halle with his sanity. Ella had to give up maternal and sexual instincts as a result of being victimised by men she describes as 'the lowest yet', and Baby Suggs must give up all her children who are dispersed by the value system underlying slavery which encouraged the free and relentless barter of human beings. As the narrator tells us:

> Men and women (who were slaves) were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out , bought up, brought back, stored up mortgaged, won, stolen or seized [...] What she called the nastiness of life, was the shock she received on learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children .
>
> (Beloved 23)

This experience along with numerous other miseries endured by her and her people leads Baby Suggs to conclude her long life with the observation that "there is no bad luck in the world but White folks"(89) because "those White things have taken all I had or dreamed"(89) and "they don't know when to stop" (104). And it is Baby Suggs, the traditional Matriarch who initiates the process of healing her people through her own brand of preaching and emotional purgation.

While the victims of these atrocities suffer the psychic wound and often develop perversions in their behaviour, "Some permanent craziness

like Baby Suggs' friend, a young woman in a bonnet whose food was full of tears. Like Aunt Phyllis, who slept with her eyes wide open. Like Jackson Till, who slept under the bed" (97) and like Sethe who "talked about safety with a handsaw" and "didn't know where the world stopped and she began" (164), those who committed these acts of oppression were also effected and even transformed by it. The reflections of Stamp Paid for instance reveal the dehumanizing influence of oppression on those who attempt to dehumanize the slaves:

> White people believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unmanageable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet White blood. In a way, he thought, they were right [...] But it wasn't the jungle Blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle White folks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the Whites who had made it. Touched them everyone. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be. So scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own White skin: the red gums were their own . (198-199)

This pronouncement about White people inverts the notion of subhuman savagery and depravity attributed to the Black slaves by oppressors like the school teacher who takes over the farm Sweet Home, after Garner's death. School teacher is a typical slave master with a conviction that his slaves are subhuman. This is evident from his attempt to define them as 'animals' and to impose the definition on them. So he measures the body parts of his slaves, deprives them of the little freedom they had before, considers their opinion as bable and rules them with a whip. And Sethe overhears a conversation between the school teacher and his pupils which makes her realize his attitude towards her:

> 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 [...] I heard him say, 'No, no. that's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left (of the page he was writing on); her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up' (193)

And it is from such definitions that Sethe tries to save her children through their risky escape from the farm and through the murder of her daughter. She confesses this to Beloved in an attempt to account for her act of infanticide! " School teacher was teaching us things we couldn't learn" (191), and "so I sent you all to the wagon with the woman who waited in the corn

[...] No notebook for my babies and no measuring string neither" (198), and finally she tells herself "I'll explain to her, even though I don't have to, why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (200). The 'death' from which Sethe wanted to protect her children, then was the negation of their human dignity and self respect by a discourse which defined them as subhuman and also compelled them to internalize that definition. The reader is reminded of schoolteacher's conviction and his inscription which equates Sethe and her people with animals when Paul D Judges her crime with the words "you got two feet, Sethe, not four" (165).It appears as though the slave master's perspective of her has entered Sethe's soul: that she has denied her true self so that what is left is that created by the slave master. Carolyn Jones[3] subscribes to this view as is evident from the following observation:

> What is worse than slavery is to let the soul become so contorted that the only self you are is the self that the master defines for you. Sethe stops school teacher (from taking them back to Sweet Home), but she destroys her child and nearly herself. Paul D tells Sethe that she has two legs; not four; she is human, not animal. accepting school teacher's definition of herself creates Sethe's 'thick love', the love that is 'safety with a handsaw' and that keeps Sethe from knowing where the world stops and where she begins . (618)

But the analysis offered by Stamp Paid in the novel appears more to the point. According to him, "she (Sethe) ain't crazy. She love those children. She was trying to out hurt the hurter [...] And spread it" (234) . though the infanticide is obviously the result of psychic perversion, as is realized by the Black community which condones her rage but not her reaction, it is not a conformation of the worst stereotype imposed on them by the oppressors ie., that of "people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (Beloved 151). It is in fact a complex , though misguided, action where pride and rage and utter desperation merge with maternal love and the urge to protect. Deprived of her mother's milk and robbed of her own, by the slave masters, Sethe equates slave status with "having no nursing milk to call my own" (200)and her maternal love for her children, who are regarded by her as the best part of herself , sustains her through out her journey into freedom; "what I had to get through later (she tells Beloved), I got through because of you [...] I walked right on by because only me had your milk, and God do what he would , I was going to get it to you" (198). And she equates freedom with being able to love her children without any restraint and with having "Milk enough for all" (198). When she kills her daughter to protect her from slavery, "blood and breast milk, rage pride, and love become one" (Jones 617). And in Sethe's claim: "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe"(162) lies a paradoxical desire to protect through destruction rather than savagery or the cannibalism that she is accused of.

This destruction of her child which Sethe prefers instead of surrender is also equivalent to self-destruction since Sethe, as Morrison observes, is "a woman (who) loved something other than herself so much (that) she had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself" (qtd from Jones 617). The excessive emphasis placed by Sethe on her role as mother, prevents her from recognizing the otherness of her children as is evident from Sethe's memory of her crime:

> She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful (ie., her children), and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out ,away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place(of the living), where they would be safe. (163)

this maternal conviction that children are but an extension of the mother's self characterizes all of Sethe's actions until Paul D points out to her that she is her best self, not her children: that she has a life of her own apart from theirs.

Sethe's claim, however, like her crime, is hers alone. The Black community which is well aware of the context and the circumstances which lead to Sethe's rage, nevertheless considers her action as prideful and perverted. This is evident from the immediate response of the many Black

people who gather near the woodshed where Sethe attempts to kill all her children and succeeds in cutting the throat of Beloved. The narrator describing Sethe's arrest comments:

> Holding the living child (Denver who was saved by Stamp Paid), Sethe walked past them in their silence and hers. She climbed into the cart, her profile knife clean against a cheery blue sky. A profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high, her back a little too straight? Probably.. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once, the moment she appeared in the doorway [...] Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on the way. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about [...] And then no words. Humming. No words at all. (152)

The role of music, the wordless, prelingual, primal sound, as a sustaining and strengthening force in the life of her people has often been described by Toni Morrison with in her novels and elsewhere. In Beloved the power of such music is illustrated in the scene in which the community women sing to exorcise Beloved. And when the community denies Sethe the support of its music, it is the first step in punishing her for her pride. What follows is total isolation of Sethe, as a result of which the community itself becomes guilty of the sin of pride as Carolyn Jones has pointed out. When the women of the community assemble before Sethe's house to exorcise the ghost within

and to rescue Sethe, it becomes as much of an act of atonement as a means of healing both for themselves and for Sethe. Their singing, is itself a form of counter violence since 'the sound that broke the back of words' (201) violates the spell of Beloved, drives her out and saves Sethe by reenacting the scene of murder and thereby achieving 'rememory' for Sethe and for themselves.

The meaning and purpose of violence in the works of those representing marginalized and oppressed races, it is clear, takes on many dimensions. The function of violence and counter violence in various forms in the novels of the three authors under study ranges from exploitation to liberation, from self expression to escape, from perverted protest to culturally informed resistance to oppression, discrimination and misrepresentation.

Notes

1. The concept of the violence of representation and its dimensions in literature has been elaborated in The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence. ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse. London and New York: Routledge. 1989.

2. Bernard Bell emphasizes the prominence given in Beloved to the experiences of Black women slaves besides discussing the double consciousness of the Afro-Americans which helps them to survive under duress.

3. Carolyn Jones equates Sethe's crime and her pride with that of the Biblical Cain. But Sethe acts out of desperation and love and not out of envy or hatred. It is her 'Cain's mark' ie., a scar on her back shaped like a tree, that connects her to the image of Cain.

Reclaiming the Past

Binu P.S “Protest and resistance in the works of Morrison, Armstrong and Culleton ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Chapter IV

Reclaiming the Past

The journey from the endurance of oppression to an effective resistance of it involves, among other things, a revision and recreation of the individual and communal history of the oppressed. This is especially true in the context of communities whose past struggles for survival have been deliberately misrepresented or ignored as part of a systematic cultural genocide which coincides with the ideology of oppression. The significance of this process of looking back in anger for the non-White races in America and Canada has been stressed by the Black American and native writers as well as the representatives of other racial minorities.

Toni Morrison, for instance, emphasizes the urgent need to reclaim the past when she points out:

> We live in a land where the past is always erased and America is the innocent future in which immigrants can come and start over, where the slate is clean. The past is absent or it's romanticised. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past. That

> memory is much more in danger now than it was 30 years ago. (Morrison Living Memory 1)

Elsewhere[1] she comments on the desire of the Whites to reconstruct all aspects of their own past so as to justify the 'past' era of slavery which again implys misrepresentation.

It is due to a similar process of misrepresentation and suppression of the past history of native Indians and other minority groups that writers like Sylvia Soderlind[2] fails to see the presence of oppression in Canada.

> As an immigrant I keep looking in vain for evidence of the oppression of Canadians in any other form than as a trope providing fertile material for cultural practices [...] it is the Canadian writer's moral luck to have the paradigm of colonialism at her disposal. (Soderlind 102)

But this remark has to be read in the light of the fact that the very concept of a 'Canadian' writer or writing effectively precludes the natives and other minorities and their literatures, not to speak of their history of endured oppression. 'The Canadian writer' apparently is the White Canadian writer who indeed from her/his privileged position often appropriates the vocabulary of the colonised. It is the awareness of such

exclusion that induces the mistrust felt by aboriginal and racial minority writers for such concepts as Canadian nationalism.

Erasing the past of the oppressed through exclusion or misinterpretation, then, is a potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor. Any attempt to resist such ideological conquest invariably involves re-reading and coming to terms with the past. The three authors under study reveal similarities as well as differences in dealing with the past.

Their task is more problematic than it appears. Modern critical studies point out, for instance that experience is the effect of representation and not its unproblematic referent, that experience is accessible only through representation, and that representation mediates/appropriates all experience. If this be admitted of the most 'accurate' or 'realistic' representations, then the extent to which deliberate misrepresentation obscures the actual suffering and struggles experienced by oppressed races becomes obvious. The writers who would articulate their protest or resist such obscuring must not only counter the constructions of the dominant discourse but also "participate in the debate around the nature of representation and social constructionism", as Valerie Smith observes about modern novels that review the story of slavery, "examining self-consciously what it means to write about slavery" (Smith 344) or about colonisation as the case may be.

It is natural for the members of the dominant race to construct the past as well as present of the native or the slave in ways that suits them most as part of a process of othering which rationalises oppression and eases the guilt of imperialism. Such constructions are propagated through educational institutions, the media, literature and other art forms and results in the creation of stereotypes. The aboriginal tribes of America and Canada, for instance, have been envisioned, either with a mixture of dread and scorn as the implecable foe, or with sentimental romanticism as the noble savage[3] and these and other stereotypes have been reflected in literature ever since early writers such as Major John Richardson in Canada and James Fenimore Cooper in America drew up the romantic figure of the noble Indian uncorrupted by modern civilization. Such legends and myths of a good natured people victimised by changing times and technology has often masked the actual facts about the condition of these people; their degradation and exploitation in the nineteenth century and prejudice and rejection in the twentieth.

These opposing images of the native constructed by the Whites often transfigure their records - in traveller's reports, historical documents or creative writing - of historic events involving the native people. Elizabeth Waterston, for instance, records in her short history of Canadian literature the reactions of two writers to the same episode in native history: the Pontiac rising of 1763. On the one hand, there is Alexander Henry's report of 1809 which stresses the savage brutality of the scene of fighting:

> The dead were scalped and mangled. The dying were writhing and shrieking under the unsatiated knife and tomahawk. And from the bodies of some ripped open, their butchers were drinking the blood [...]. (19)

and on the otherhand there is John Richardson's account of the same event in a romantic novel which emphasises the dignity and honour of the warrior:

> A tall and noble looking warrior, wearing a deer skin hunting frock closely girded round his loins, appeared to command the deference of his colleagues [...] with a bold and confiding carriage, the fierce Pontiac moved at the head of his little party. (19)

The two narratives put side by side by Waterston reveal the truth of the generalisation that all such accounts are implicated by ideological discourse and that the narrator is not an objective commentator of historical facts. They also throw light on the twin paths through which the history of the natives was generally lead.

If the native male was stereotyped as the noble savage or the barbarian foe in the nineteenth century and as the drunken Indian or as "theives full of lice" (Slash 24) in the twentieth, the native women were also prey to the same process. The female types presented in Ameri- Canadian

literature range from the Goddess like, mysterious Indian maiden, or the spiritual guide to the more common, passive and willing squaw -- the victim of the native girl syndrome that the social worker in Culleton's novel describes.

The same process of stereotyping was operative in the case of the Black Americans as part of enslavement and marginalization. Hence the creation of uncle Tom for the male and the Black mama for the female slave to follow. These constructed identities effectively mask the real people behind them and distort even their own self image not to speak of the remembrance of things past.

The three representative authors from these communities: Armstrong, Culleton and Toni Morrison have attempted in their own way to counter such distortion of their communal past and present and to open up possibilities of alternative versions though each of them is fully conscious of the fact that the process of going over the past is necessarily painful. Jeannette Armstrong, for instance, begins her novel Slash (1985) stressing the need to come to terms with the turmoil of the past as her hero asserts in the prologue.

> Yet I must examine how I changed and what caused the changes. I must understand it and understanding it, I may

> understand what changes our people went through during those times and what we are coming up against. (13)

Here, the titular character of the novel does not merely try to make sense of the traumatic experiences of frustration, self doubts, anger and hate that he has been through, but also to comprehend and find linguistic expression for the often inarticulate effects of oppression that his people endured through the years. This in turn enables him and his people to face and resist "what we are coming up against" (Slash 13). Similar is the intention of Beatrice Culleton who makes her protagonist, April Raintree, in the novel named after her, muse on the nature of memory and observe, "I always felt most of my memories were better left untouched but now I think its best to go back in my life before I go forward" (April 1). But Toni Morrison states more specifically the purpose of reviving and dwelling on the past which is so frequent in her novels as she comments.

> There is no need to be nostalgic about the good old days because they weren't [...] but to recognise and rescue those qualities of resilience, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up.
>
> (Rediscovering Black History 16)

All three novelists are agreed then that a revision of the past is essential both to lighten the burden of the present as well as to enable their people to face the future effectively.

The very motive for writing Armstrong's novel lay in a desire on the part of the novelist to counter misrepresentation as is evident from Penny Petrone's observation:

> Jeannette C Armstrong's novel Slash (1985) was written to give the native perspective on the North American Indian Protest Movement of the sixties to the eighties for a contemporary social studies unit for grades eight to eleven [...] she [Armstrong] was actively involved in the Indian Movement of the sixties and seventies and in Slash tried to eradicate misconceptions and to recount the historical details accurately and clearly. (140)

Armstrong's official mission, then was to "give the native perspective" and her personal endeavour, "to eradicate misconception" (Petrone 140). This may induce the feeling that the novel addresses the non-natives rather than the writer's own community. But a close examination of the text reveals that re-experiencing the past is as indispensable to the narrator, the author and the people they represent as it is useful to the general reader as an alternative piece of historical narrative.

As for the official mission of providing the native's perspective on the Indian Movement of the sixties and seventies, Armstrong accomplishes the task with comprehensive insight and great sagacity, outlining not just the common impulse of protest and self assertion which characterized the Red Power Movement but also the disputes, differences and often contradictory undercurrents which were embedded in it. However, she does not presume to make any claims of absolute authenticity or accuracy being aware of the nature of all representations and the limitations of a work of historical fiction. Hence, the appology with which her protagonist concludes the prologue to the novel. "The events are based on actual events but are not meant to be portrayed as historically accurate" (Slash 13).

Armstrong, in choosing the historic theme for her novel does more than just documenting the native's perspective, she, in fact provides a thorough and complex analysis of racism, sexism and classism as endured by her people as the by-products of Canada's colonial legacy. In addition, she identifies decolonization as the solution to all such oppression and as a means to defuse specific issues such as the settlement of native land claims. Decolonization, however, cannot be achieved or even contemplated without an examination of the ways in which colonialist oppression effects native individuals and groups. A woman activist in Slash points out:

> The only way that we can really regain control is for us to really change. It means that we are going to have to rebuild ourselves; rebuild our health, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. We're a long way from being totally in control over our lives. In fact we can't even talk about it. Except, we know that it is possible and that it is what we are moving towards. (218)

But before moving towards such a reconstruction of themselves they need to trace the cause of oppression to its root in the colonial history of Canada. As Lee Maracle comments in I Am Woman: "Once we understand what kind of world they have created then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create" (116). Native writers such as Armstrong have attempted to locate the root of oppression based on race, sex and class in Canada's colonial history in such a way that they could begin to find the means of changing the system which perpetuates that oppression.

Colonization in Canada and America has been characterised by an attempt to eliminate the preserved history and tradition of the aboriginal people from memory. As George Ryga points out in his 'Foreword' (1984) to Slash, this elimination was often brought about by using religion and alcohol as "mind-altering drugs" (10). By this means the old Indian traditions were either wiped out from memory or turned into objects of scorn

and humiliation. This is recognised early in Amstrong's novel by the protagonist's parents who defiantly try to keep alive their ancient way of life following faithfully the traditional beliefs and ideals in the face of constant motivation to assimilate. They resist, for instance, the efforts of some members of their own community to gain equal rights of access to alcohol as they are aware of its potential to erase their very identity. This apprehension is embodied in the comments of Tommy's father who explains:

> Indians can't buy it [beer]. It's against the law. Now they want to change the law so they can buy it without going to Jail [...] Its better if nobody could buy it. But they would find a way to get it any way. So that's why I say, just stay away from it even if they change the law [...] if you learn good things and think good, no paper laws are needed for you. That's how we believe. (21)

The significance of this warning, against confusing potential annihilation with potential freedom and equality, remains in tact in spite of the tragic irony which overshadows these words in the light of the subsequent breakdown of the family due to alcoholism as portrayed in the novel. The use of Christian religion as a mind-altering drug is also resisted by some of Slash's own people as they hold fast to Indian spirituality and refuse to go to church. As Slash recalls, "My parents and grand parents weren't church goers. They said the priests may be didn't understand that the creator was all over. You could talk to him anywhere but mostly in your heart. They said you only

had to go to church if you done bad things and couldn't face it" (30). This assertion of faith in the universal spirit in contrast to worshiping God in church gathers the power of resistance considering the role played by churches in the course of colonization in taking up 'the Whiteman's burden' of enlightening the 'savage' natives. The same contrast is stressed when Slash explains to a priest why his people do not attend church after telling the priest that he and his people are not catholic he asserts the catholicity of their own faith. "They pray a lot, all the time, in Indian way. They say we got to pray all the time no matter what we're doing. They say the whole world is our church and we go to church all the time" (36). Thus the Okanagan people in the novel attempt to preserve their traditional way of life and to incorporate the past with the present.

The expropriation of the native culture and tradition has also been aided by the suppression of the Indian languages and the aboriginal educational process and the enforcement of western education on native children. As Lee Maracle asserts: "We have not lost our culture or had it "stolen" much of the information that was available to us through our education process has been expropriated and consigned to dead wood leaves in the libraries" (92) and she rightly accounts for this with the comment:

> Destruction and expatriation of knowledge, particularly, language, medicine [science] and culture is a prerequisite for the unabated persecution of pockets of resistance. The aims of the colonizer

> are to break up communities and families, and to destroy the sense of nationhood and the spirit of co-operation among the colonized. (93)

The success of this programme of expropriation is evident in the discord and division seen in the Okanagan community which brings up Armstrong's hero. While many of the people on the reserve, represented by Jimmy and his family as easy victims begin to glory in the belief that "nobody need to talk Indian any more" and "my dad and them are smart. They are up-to-date" (26), the more resistant people including Slash's own, recognise the harm done though powerless as yet to rectify it. The old chief Pra-cwa, for instance, attributes all the negative signs of assimilation, loss of pride and inadequacy that he sees in his people to the loss of language and the acceptance of non-native education, "Ever since those young people went to school away from home, they are changed. They don't like our ways. May be it's because they only know English. They are ashamed of everything Indian" (25). Hence the revival of the aboriginal languages and the oral tradition, the stories, songs and legends becomes imperative in the process of reclaiming the past and resisting cultural oppression. Unlike some of his friends dispossessed and alienated from their cultural heritage, Slash is aware of the advantages of using the native language:

> I knew there was lots learned because of talking Indian that the other kids missed out on. A lot of it had good feelings tied to it. Like when uncle Joe and me talked about the hills and all the animals and plants, their names and the legend stories about them. Pra-cwa's early morning stories with the other old people were like that too. (26)

Through the teaching of these legends, stories and songs along with rituals and ceremonies as in the 'Pow-wows' they attend, the community trys to instill a sense of self respect and pride in the mind of the young hero to enable him to resist the humiliation and self doubt inculcated by racist oppression. Though it takes him the long journey from innocence to experience through anger, frustration, drink, drugs, political struggle and spiritual confirmation to internalize the value of these instructions Slash does acquire an insight into the continuity of the past, present and future of his people and his own role as a functional unit of the community:

> I was part of all the rest of the people. I was responsible for that. Everything I did affected that. What I was affected everyone around me, both then, and far into the future, through me and my descendants [...] I realized I carried the weight of all my people as we each did. (203)

He also discovers that the collective wisdom of the race has always been there with him and the realization of the same is essential to cope and "open

up a space between the negative stereotype of the Indian and the romanticised popular view" (Fee "Upsettingg Fake Ideas" 170), and escape the more depressing dichotomy between an assimilated Indian and a 'lost' one. Being "a veteran of the movements of the 60s and an intelligent analyst of national liberation struggles in the Third World" (Ryga. 11). Armstrong records with unflinching honesty, the details of the American Indian Movement while tracing Slash's experience as an activist. Though passionately conscious of the common impulse of unity, affirmation of traditional values and the desire for self determination which characterized the movement, she is not blinded by narrow idealism and romantic illusions. She lets her hero witness the many contradictions resulting from faulty revolutionary theories, opportunism of the leadership and confusion among the ranks regarding the motives and aims of the various sit-ins, blockades, protest rallies, occupations, caravans and endless discussions which are held throughout the continent. The many discordant views, from the most assimilationist to the most radical are given free voice in the novel and none, not even Slash's own is allowed to predominate. The lesson seems to be that there are no easy answers or tidy solutions. The difficulties faced by the natives at this juncture is centred around the struggle to "formulate an ideology and a program of action coherent enough to require government response but flexible enough to allow for local differences" as Dierdre F. Jordan has noted (281). Disagreement and contradictions are inevitable in such a process of changing the course of history. It is appropriate to record them all as well, for as modern theories point out, any piece of historical

narrative can only be a record of shifting and contradictory representations of numerous histories involving a dialectical relationship of past and present concerns.

More than any easy solution or specific achievement, it is the process of struggle and the incorporation of the past that will help to heal the wounds of colonization. This realization accounts for the positive note with which the novel ends. Penny Petrone (141) sums up, "As the archetypal hero in search of truth, Slash, the political activist emerges from his experience, stronger and wizer, choosing to return home to the community of his reserve".

With a better understanding of the whole Indian rights movement and having truly reclaimed the values of the communal past, he is content to settle down in the hope that the next generation, represented by his young son would gain some advantage. In spite of the present pitfalls, he feels that the movement "would never be put down until Indian people did what they had to. Not only for their survival, but for the survival of what is human in an inhuman world" (239).

Slash's journey away from his reserve community and its traditional values and his final return to them gives the novel a cyclic structure which corresponds to the cyclic sense of time that he acquires in the end, as he

recognizes the presentness of the past and the continuity of history into the future of his people.

If Armstrong presents an alternative perspective of native history at its most exciting juncture and comments on its value to the people through the experience of an imaginary activist. Beatrice Culleton in her novel portrays the effect of the past, personal as well as communal, on the mind and behaviour of two Metis sisters. April, the narrator, and Cheryl, her sister represent, in terms of their reaction to the Metis situation, the two stereotyped roles offered by the dominant society: those of the assimilated native and the one who is lost due to her inability or refusal to assimilate. By presenting the futility of either roles in their effort to function effectively in the mainstream of society, the novelist tries to debunk such stereotypes which are based on the "manichean aesthetics" which informs the relationship of the colonizers and the colonized according to Abdul. R. Jan Mohamed (78). The awareness of the past and the lack of it under different circumstances play a significant part in shaping the attitudes of these two characters.

The Raintrees are grim victims of the process of colonization and the consequent elimination of the traditional way of life and values of their people from memory. Henry and Alice lack the support, wisdom and the power of resistance that the Okanagan elders provide for Armstrong's

protagonist. Their constant shifting of residence from place to place is as much an indicator of separation from their roots as of economic instability. April recalls, "Although we moved from one run-down house to another, I remember only one on Jarvis avenue. And of course we were always on welfare" (2). This renders them easy prey to the trap of the oppressive system of marginalization. While the welfare cheque spells the end of self sufficient existence alcoholism ensures their permanent degradation. The children April and Cheryl therefore are dispossessed of tradition long before they are separated from their parents as they neither enjoy the wise instructions of a Pra-cwa (as Slash does) nor the spiritual support of a grand mother Cheechum that Maria Campbell's narrator in Halfbreed (1973) is favoured with. This accounts for April's refusal to see her people as noble losers and her failure to comprehend the role of the colonizers in causing the disintegration that follows.

The traumatic breakdown of the family effects the psyche of the two sisters in entirely different ways and these differences in turn, augmented by the conditions at the foster homes where they grow up, play an important role in shaping their reactions to the past. April sees it as deliberate neglect and rejection on the part of her people without comprehending the causes and this renders her memories of her personal past traumatic. In the moment of realization that the 'sickness' of her parents as she remembered it was in fact their alcoholism, she denounces them forever:

> So that's why you never got any better. Liars! That's what you are! All those promises of getting well. All those lies about taking medicine. Liars! [...] Well, you lied to us. You never intended to get better. You never cared about us [...] I hate you both for lying to us. And I hope I never see you again. (33)

This rejection of her past in which she locates the cause of her present troubles leads her to reject her community -- its past as well as present -- and to valorize the very same dominant society which brought about the economic, moral and spiritual breakdown of her people.

> It seemed to me that what I'd read and what I'd heard indicated that Metis and Indians were inclined to be alcoholics. I guess that was because they were a weak people. Oh, they were put down more than anyone else, but then, didn't they deserve it? Any ways, I could pass for a pure white person. (34)

She therefore chooses to assimilate and sees Cheryl's interest in native history as a means of coming to terms with the latter's inescapable physical appearance. The very events that Cheryl projects as the noble heritage of their people are appropriated by April as proof of White superiority.

> Riel and Dumont, they were men of the past. Why dwell on it? What concerned me was my future. This essay proved my point once again. White superiority had conquered in the end. (72)

But for Cheryl, rewriting the history of her people is not just a means of escaping the humiliation of her brown skin. It is a defiant act of self assertion and communal pride. She who has no remembrance of the degradation of her parents sees their separation as a temporary misfortune and hopes for a future reunion. This in turn leads her to romanticise her personal past and then that of her community, "I always think of Dad as a strong man. If he had been pure Indian, he would have been a chief or a warrior in the olden days. I'd sure like to know what kind of Indians we are. And I remember Mom was so beautiful. To me she was like an Indian princess" (68). This fantasy leads her to investigate the glorious past of her people and to fight misrepresentations by White historians. She does so through her speeches and writings and by refusing to accept the authenticity of history taught at school: listening to her teacher reading the history of Indian brutality towards White settlers, Cheryl demands:

> If this is history, how come so many Indian tribes were wiped out? How come they haven't got their land any more? How come their food supplies were wiped out? Lies! Lies! Lies!

> your history books don't say how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life. (40)

However, she does not argue that her own version of the past could be totally unbiased. But she points to the need of an alternative reading as she writes to April:

> (H)istory should be an unbiased representation of the facts. (Unfortunately I'm not unbiased but fortunately I don't plan on writing a history book). And if they show one side, they ought to show the other side equally. Anyways, I'm writing the Metis side of things, but just for myself and you. (63)

This attempt to know the Metis side of things sets her on a seemingly fruitful career as social worker and activist helping her people to rebuild themselves. But it seems to be the ultimate paradox of the novel that the character who accepts her Metis identity and tradition falls victim to the native girl syndrome confirming the very stereotype she sought to counter while the one who rejects everything native emerges the stronger in the end.

This paradox could be resolved by considering the fact that Cheryl is portrayed essentially as an idealist whose awareness of the past, both personal and communal lacks a sense of reality. In spite of her passionate desire to counter White role constructions, she adheres to the earlier

stereotyped view of her people as beautiful losers. Even her vision of future is centred on a return to an idyllic precolonial state of existence, "When Mom and Dad got better and took us back we could move to the B.C. Rockies and live like olden day Indians" (68). As this fantasy is shattered by reality shock in the face of her discovery of the truth about her parents and the present condition of her people, she responds by choosing the wilful path of self destruction. April, on the other hand, traverses the path of assimilation and learns the hard way to reckon with the inescapable reality of being Metis in a society dominated by the Whites. The breakdown of her marriage due to her Metis blood, the psychological breakdown of her self-image on being raped as a squaw and the emotional breakdown due to her sister's tragic death forces April to accept and come to terms with her Metis identity as well as her place in the community with an awareness firmly rooted in reality. This in turn enables her to envision a future to be achieved through a process of struggle which would incorporate the lesson learned from the past:

> Cheryl had died. But for Henry Liberty and me, there would be a tomorrow. And it would be better. I would strive for it. For my sister and her son. For my parents. For my people. (184)

The novel ends on this note of affirmation even as Armstrong's Slash does. And apart from stressing the significance of a return to the community and a

struggle for a better future for the new generations the two novels attempt in different ways to revise the past of the aboriginal people and analyse its influence on the economic, moral, spiritual and psychological condition of the people. Despite their differences the two novelists have attempted to counter misrepresentations of their people and, as Margery fee ("Upsetting" 170) points out, to open up spaces between the manichean choices offered by the dominant society.

A similar concern with history and its effects on the life of the present characterises the works of many Black American women writers, Toni Morrison being one of the foremost among them. In a comparative study of these writers, Susan Willis (1987) for instance observes:

> History gives topic and substance to Black Women's writing. No one can read a novel by Toni Morrison or Alice Walker or Paule Marshell with out confronting history, feeling its influence and experiencing the changes wrought by history. (3)

And since culture is often synonymous with history, their writing is devoted to the retrieval of Afro- American Culture, which is either threatened by assimilation or misappropriated by others. Morrison is acutely conscious of these threats faced by the Black American culture and traditions. In an interview with Charles Ruas on different aspects of her writing she

comments on the appropriation of the mythology music and lore of her people:

> The consequences of the political thrust to share in the economy and power of the country [and] the entertainment world and fashion have eaten away at all of those moorings, so that the music is'nt ours any more. It used to be an underground personal thing. It's right that it should be larger now [...] But what that means is something else has to take its place. And that something else I think I can do best in novels. (Ruas 238)

The very process of writing, therefore performs for her an act of reclaiming what is lost.

As for the loss of traditional values through integration into the dominant society and assimilation of its culture, Morrison associates it in her writing with a significant transition in American history which had a profound effect on the life of black Americans. This was the transition from an agrarian to an urban society especially in the northern states and the consequent migration of Black American people in large numbers to the urban North. As Susan Willis points out, the implications of such a change was not just economical. It had a profound effect in terms of "the influence on human social relations and the formation of people's sensibilities and desires" (Willis 4). This is the historical context in which Morrison bases

her early novels to analyse the effects of such migration on the Black people not just in terms of their desires and sensibility, but their behaviour, identity and the very workings of their psyche. It is significant therefore, that she chooses Lorain Ohio as the setting for her first novel, The Bluest Eye (1970) which deals with the 1940's when many Black families were moving into the city in the hope of finding better employment there. And Ohio reflects both the city life of the north as well as the southern traditions:

> The northern part of the state had underground railway stations and a history of black people escaping into Canda. But the southern part of the state is as much Kentucky as there is, complete with cross burnings. (Peach 3)

The setting is also appropriate to her novel as it was also the place where the novelist spent her formative years. The fact is important to Morrison herself as she writes with a deep sense of her own environment; a sense of place and of her roots in her community. As Gay Wilentz has pointed out, although she has acknowledged the influence of writers such as Faulkner and Marquez, "Morrison's writings are deeply entrenched in her own black folk roots and the community in which she grew up. Moreover, her text is informed by her mother's stories, her tribe and her ancestors African and African-American" (Wilentz 61). From these cultural moorings Morrison analyses what the growing town of Ohio, "this melting pot on the lip of America facing the cold but receptive Canada (Morrison The Bluest Eye 91)

did to the Black people who moved in from the rural South during this transition in American history. The Breedloves in The Bluest Eye represent such a family of Black emigrants.

Pauline and Cholly Breedlove from Kentucky decide to "go way up north where Cholly said steel mills were begging for workers" (90) and they set out "young loving and full of energy" (90). But Pauline soon finds herself alienated. She attributes it partly to the presence of White people in large numbers, "It was hard to get to know folk up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks. The ones I seed before was something hateful but [...] we didn't have too much truck with them" (91). But migration to the North signifies more than a confrontation with and contamination by the Whites. It involves a transition in social class within the Black community itself as the people embrace the ideology and life style of the bourgeois class with which Morrison equates the White world. Pauline therefore is made to observe intuitively the difference between the people "up north" and the community she came from. "Northern colored folk was different too. Dirty - like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, cept I didn't expect it from them" (91). In the face of such rejection Pauline soon adopts the life-style of her neighbours and is educated further by the movies and soon, as the omniscient narrator puts it: "She came into her own with the women who had despised her" (98).

Pauline's remembrance of her past is clothed in sensuality. This becomes significant for, as critics like Valerie Smith (1993) and Susan Willis (1987) have observed, the sensual and even the sexual are often related to the past and function as registers of the experience of history as change. Pauline's recollection of the sexual pleasure experienced early in her married life is an instance in point. She describes the experience of orgasmic pleasure in a language bordering on surrealism, "[g]iving taste to color and making it possible for colors to trickle and flow" (Willis 83) and to be internalised as a "rainbow all inside" (Morrison Bluest Eye 101) using sensual images from her childhood. The streak of green from the June bugs, the purple, of the berries she used to pick and "Mama's lemonade yellow", these colours from her early life in the rural South, provide metaphorical expression to the pleasure remembered from the more recent past and are juxtaposed with the colourless alienation of her present in the urban North.

Cholly Breedlove, the other victim of migration also undergoes a similar process of transformation. The sensuality of his past is also used to contrast the bluntness of his present. But unlike the recollections of Pauline, the story of his past is narrated entirely by the omniscient narrator and never in first person by himself. This can be seen as a measure of the extent to which he is alienated from his roots and sunk in degradation resulting in alcoholism and apathy even as the Raintrees in Culleton's novel

(whose past is summed up in a couple of sentences by April at the start of the novel and never mentioned again).

The narrative of Cholly's past in the rural South is as full of sensuous scenes as Pauline's memory of her girlhood. The pine wood scene with Darlene which becomes a turning point in his life due to the psychic wound it leads to is embedded in sensuality. The sound of pine needles rustling, the smell of pine and promised rain, the taste of grape in his mouth, the feel of the breeze and the sight of Darlene in the moonlight leads him on to an intimacy with her just before the intrusion of the hunters. Similarly, the best of Cholly's memories ie., the scene in which Blue Jack obtains the 'heart' of a water melon smashed open at a church picnic, stands out for the sensual pleasures it offers as well as the pre-urban way of life it suggests. Filled with mouth organ music and pine scent and the melon itself, "(b)lood red, its planes dull and blunted with sweetness, its edges rigid with juice. Too obvious, almost obscene, in the joy it promised" (105), so that little boy Cholly imagines it to be "the nasty-sweet guts of the earth" (105), the scene fully occupies all the senses. The general mood of sharing and communal joy as opposed to any sense of possession or individual pleasure, along with the proximity to nature, point to a decidedly rural living.

Sensuality, then is a characteristic of the experienced past in Morrison's first novel. Susan Willis has also described yet another scene in which a whore, Miss Marie remembers an old time meal of fish and cold

beer to point out this link between the sensual and the rural past in The Bluest Eye.

The separation from and the denial of the traditional way of life on Pauline's part involves an attempt to gain acceptance in her present environment while the transformation of Cholly constitutes a more complex process of psychological repression. Pauline's efforts to counter alienation removes her further from her cultural centre as she strives to achieve the White bourgeois social model in which she works but does not live. This in turn leads her to live a kind of schizophrenia as she detaches herself from the supposed ugliness of her own body and that of her family to identify with the beauty, order, power and luxury that she is made to believe, belongs to the White family in which she has positioned herself as the ideal servant. This has the tragic effect of splitting her emotions and displacing her affections in her role as mother: she showers love on her employer's child and violence on her own.

Cholly on the other hand is better integrated to the northern neighbourhood as a wage labourer in the steel mills. He represses his past as it is traumatic, consisting as it does of the rejection of his parents and the humiliation by the White hunters. This repression (which also cuts him off from the anchor of the community in which he was brought up by aunt

Jimmy and her friends) leads to perversions resulting in alcoholism, violence and the psychic confusion in which he rapes his own daughter.

In contrast to the Breedloves, Claudia Mac Teer who narrates part of the story is characterised by unrepressed sensuality and a notion of the presentness of the past. The part of the narrative that she handles is circular corresponding to her cyclic sense of time and is divided after the four seasons. It ends where it begins: in the ruin of Pecola Breedlove as the communal scapegoat and the absence of marigold flowers which signify the loss of innocence. Her sensuality is revealed when, as the adult narrator, she recalls how she was fascinated in childhood by all the functions of her body and was repelled by "the dreadful and humiliating absence of dirt. The irritable unimaginative cleanliness" (15) after a thorough bath. Her wish to experience sensual pleasures and "feel some things on Christmas day" rather than "possess any object" (15) is in keeping with her disposition. Her awareness of the cyclic nature of time is related to her sensitive reaction to the seasons. She manifests an intuitive knowledge of the presentness of the past when she fuses the memory of a summer storm in 1941 that she experienced and that of a tornado her mother knew in 1929:

> I recall a summer storm in the town where we lived and imagine a summer my mother knew in 1929. There was a tornado that year, she said that blew away half of south Lorain. I mix up her summer with my own. Bitting the

> strawberry, thinking of storms I see her, a slim young girl in a pink crepe dress. (147)

This ability to see her mother in her girlhood and to identify with her experience is part of the mother-daughter bond which has for ages been the instrument of cultural continuity in the Black community. This bond enriched by the transference of stories, songs and myths enables Claudia to acquire a sense of the traditions and history of her people. And it is she who survives all the ruin that follows and remains, "strong smiling and relaxed while the world falls down about her" (147). And in spite of her confession that "it's much much much too late" (164) to account for the victimisation of Pecola and that "since 'why' is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in 'how'" (3), she does acquire a deep understanding of the destructive forces that worked against the Black girl who was driven to yearn for blue eyes and recognizes that the horror at the heart of Pecola's yearning is exceeded only by the evil of its fulfillment (162).

Morrison's emphasis on the need to uncover the past and to incorporate it with the present in order to achieve authenticity as a means of resistance is much more evident in Song of Solomon (1977). While The Bluest Eye and Sula (1973), her second novel, span the 1940s (the latter looking backward to the 1920s and forward to the 60s as well), Song of Solomon deals with the 1960s characterised by the life of the ghetto,

cultural awareness, urban political actvism and a need to return to the roots. It was a time when the Black neighbourhoods of the 40s had become the community of the ghettoes and to the successive generations of the emigrants, their origins in the South had become so remote that it had to be uncovered. Willis remarks:

> In contrast with Milkman [the protagonist of the novel] the black youth of the forties had no need to uncover and decipher the past simply because enough of it was still present. Born on successive waves of southern black immigrants, for Milkman, the past is a riddle, a reality locked in the verses of a children's song. (95)

This indicates that for people like Milkman the search for the past was no less than a journey into the unknown. Morrison, therefore, appropriates the conventional romance quest framework with an archetypal hero in search of truth. She uses a Blackman as the protagonist and sets him on a gold hunt which takes him instead to his ancestral roots.

The theme of a quest into the past is evident from the epigraph of the novel which reads, "The fathers may soar/and the children may know their names." This process of knowing their names involves the discovery of their (the ancestors') history, their song and myth and through them, the seeker's own true self. As the quest is to be carried through communal

memory, the potency of that memory and its resilience over the dictates of the dominant society are stressed in the very beginning of the novel. The omniscient narrator describes how the Black people call the street where the first Black doctor had lived as Doctor Street in spite of its official name Mains Avenue, in an attempt to preserve the memory of the man among them who had risen against all odds. When the city legislators issue public notice that the street will "always be known as Mains Avenue and not Doctor Street" (4), the response of the community is at once comic as well as defiant, "It was a genuinely clarifying public notice [says the narrator] because it gave southside residents a way to keep their memory alive and please the city legislators as well. They called it "Not Doctor Street" (Morrison, Song of Solomon 4). This act of reclaiming a name and the memory behind the name by the southside residents, along with the epigraph, introduce one of the major pre-occupations in the novel--the process of naming and the implications of names.

But before dealing with the quest into the names and their meanings, Morrison sets the background providing the protagonist, Milkman, with different options, opposing sets of values and ways of life and differing attitudes to the past. Antithetical sets of characters are introduced for this purpose. Macon Dead Jr., the rich slumlord who heads a typical patriarchal nuclear family (the model so central to the western civilization) is a quintessential self-made man, caught in the American dream of 'rags to

riches'. Orphaned and disinherited in his adolescence, Macon leaves the past behind acquiring a linear conception of time and opts for the rigid materialism and rugged individualism which brings him financial success but alienates him from his cultural heritage and coasts him his own capacity for emotional expansiveness. The past is but a fading memory which has no place in his present life and as a well integrated member of the Black bourgeois class he believes in the advice he gives his son Macon, nicknamed Milkman:

> Come to my office, work a couple of hours there and learn what's real. Let me tell you right now that 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 other people too. (55)

This yearning for ownership and possession makes him a pitiless landlord and isolates him from the community as the people come to feel that "a nigger in business is a terrible thing to see" (22). Macon's futuristic, linear vision of time, symptomatic of his adherence to rigid western values is evidenced by his failure to consider the past as part of himself and his refusal to acknowledge his sister Pilate and the significance of their shared past. "At one time she had been the dearest thing in the world to him. Now she is odd, murky, and worst of all, unkempt. A regular source of embarrassment if he would allow it. But he would not allow it" (20). When

he slips into the memory of their past at his father's farm, Lincoln's Heaven, it surprises him, for "(h)e had not said any of this for years. Had not even reminisced much about it recently [...] for years he hadn't had that kind of time or interest" (51-52). And even when his interest in the past is rekindled by his son's journey of discovery, he is eager to visit his boyhood friends at Danville who would understand and admire his own glory rather than Virginia from where his great ancestor Solomon flew home to Africa.

In sharp contrast to this character, Morrison draws up the larger than life figure of Pilate, Macon Dead's sister, whose values and memories pilot Milkman on to a path of discovery of their common heritage. Unlike Macon Dead Jr., she presides over a household which is predominantly female--the three-women-utopia so frequent in Morrison's fiction. While Macon leaves the past behind, Pilate not only makes it an essential part of her present identity but carries its residue with her as her inheritance. Her treasure from the past consists of rocks from every place she has been to, a geography book which informs her about those places, a box with her name in it and the bones of her father [which she mistakes to be the bones of the man her brother murdered and which she preserves as a form of accepance of the responsibility for the deed]. So completely is her present informed with the past that every act and object around her is associated with some image or memory from the past; the soft boiled egg she cooks for Milkman and Guitar sets her thinking about her girlhood in Lincoln's Heaven, and the patch of blue sky she sees outside is the "same color as my mama's

ribbons" (42). It is from her that Milkman hears for the first time the song which functions as the unwritten text of his ancestral history though the distance in time and space has corrupted her version of the song of Solomon.

Pilate's reactions to the traumatic experience of witnessing her father's death and isolation from her people are in sharp contrast to Macon's. Severed from her family due to her father's murder and estrangement from Macon, and isolated from the community due to the physical oddity of having no navel, Pilate does not reject what she learns from her past and that of her people. Instead she uses the knowledge as a means to tackle "the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her" (149). While she discards - "every assumption she had learned": such as regard for money, status, occupation, hygiene and manner, she preserves the deeper values infused by the traditional lifestyle such as compassion, respect, loyalty and generosity and above all, a capacity for emotional and spiritual expansiveness. And this reinstates her into the community though her position is still "just barely within the boundaries of the elaborately socialized world of Black people" (150). Moreover, while the rigid materialistic values render the members of Macon's family emotionally empty and spiritually 'dead', Pilate's house brims with life, energy and sensuality. Pilate, Reba and Hagar achieve such raport and harmony through collective activities such as wine making that they often burst into spontaneous singing. It is Pilate, therefore, who

becomes instrumental to open up the imagination of the young hero who retraces the path she had travelled during his unwitting quest for identity.

The quest and the resulting discovery is indeed unwitting as the seeker begins with a misconception that gold could lead him to his true identity and free him from his familial bonds. This is symptomatic of his belief in and practice of his father's values as evidenced by his free exploitation of his mother and sisters, Pilate and above all Hagar, and his apathy towards Guitar's highly sensitive political awareness. The futuristic vision of time acquired from Macon induces him to believe that by leaving his home town and refusing responsibility for the past and by ensuring a successful future by retrieving Pilate's gold would provide him with a "clean - lined definite self" (184). He also disregards the feelings of his relations and friends and refuses to understand them beyond the requirements of his own selfish motives:

> [H]e thought he deserved only to be loved - from a distance, though -- and given what he wanted. And in return he would be ... what ? pleasant? generous? May be all he was really saying was: I am not responsible for your pain: share your happiness with me but not your unhappiness. (280)

But his journey from Michigan to Danville and then to Shalimar, Virginia transforms him in many ways. All the assumptions and values he had

learned prove futile and invalid in the land of his ancestors where communal and spiritual values prevail over individualism and materialism and where the cocoon of his made - up - personality gives way forcing him in an epiphanic moment in the forest to confront his real self:

> There was nothing here to help him -- not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit or his shoe, 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. (280)

He soon loses the rest of his material possessions as well and returns home "with almost none of the things he had taken with him" (338) but having acquired his song and his self: having learned to feel secure in the "rough but maternal hands" of a sweet gum tree, to "listen with his finger tips" and pull out meaning from the grass blade; to walk the earth "like he belonged to it. Like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil" (284). The journey which takes him away from commodities, consumerism and an urban way of life, as Willis (1987) points out enables him to feel emotionally expansive and to empathise with his people besides deciphering history from the verses of a children's song preserved as part of the oral tradition. He also acquires a cyclic conception of time in this process. His willingness to preserve the

box of Hagar's hair after her death due to his rejection of her love is in keeping with Pilate's conviction. She observes:

> You can't take a life and walk off and leave it. Life is life. Precious. And the dead you kill is yours. They stay with you any way in your mind. So its a better thing [...] to have the bones [or something of the dead person] right there with you where ever you go. (210)

Adherence to this principle on Milkman's part reveals his readiness to take responsibility for the past and to synthesize it with his present.

Thus the journey of the protagonist, "backwards historically and southward geographically to rediscover a heritage where oppression and liberation are paradoxically drawn together" (Fergusan, 109) enables him to internalize the Afro-centric culture which he had failed to learn from Pilate as opposed to the Euro-centric values of his father.

It has been pointed out by critics that the novel merges mythical history with documented history. While it reveals the tale of the flying African and his descendants on the one hand, it also discusses major political events of the time on the other hand which includes the murder of Emmet Till, protest movements and the emergence of secret sects such as

the Seven Days formed by Guitar and his friends to repay violence with violence to keep the racial ratio evenly balanced.

The end of the novel is open but also liberating. While the tale begins with Mr. Robert Smith's effort to fly and Pilate's version of the song of Solomon heralding the birth of Milkman Dead, it ends with Milkman's own leap into freedom, authenticity and identification in his flight with the mythical ancestor Solomon himself who had flown away from slavery to freedom. Having learned in his final moment that if he surrendered to the air, he could ride it, the protagonist of the novel is able to transcend time and liberate himself from the incoherence of his identity and the vanity which had weighed him down like the peacock he had seen. Not only does he uncover and decipher the names of the soaring fathers but also soars with them. Susan Willis observes about the end of the quest:

> The end point of Milkman's journey is the starting point of his race's history in this country; slavery. The confrontation with the reality of slavery coming at the end of Milkman's penetration into historical process is liberational because [...] the novel opens out to Africa, the source. (95-96)

This leads to the conclusion that using the myth of the flying African, Morrison has, as Willis goes on to say, transformed "the moment of coming to grip with slavery as an allegory of liberation" (96).

If the end of Song of Solomon is liberating, that of Morrison's next novel Tar Baby (1981) is relatively depressing, though not totally bewildering, as this novel presents a group of cultural exiles, deeply dispossessed of their traditional roots, brought together on a Caribbean island named Isle des Chevaliers. Continuing her interest in the successive decades of Black American history, Morrison deals with the 1980s in this novel when the possibility of reclaiming the cultural centre had become much more remote for the Afro-American people than it had been in the sixties. Hence the novel is concerned with what Eleanor Traylor describes as "the carcinogenic disease eating away at the ancestral spirit of the race" (Mckay Critieal Essays 146).

The Black American folk tale of the Tar Baby and the trickster rabbit which the novelist chose for the skeleton of this novel had in itself seemed to her "overwhelmingly history as well as prophecy" (Ruas 225-26). And so by giving those characters parts she interprets the tale as an allegory of the harmful effects of Euro-centric values and way of life on the Afro-American men and women. She has explained her motives and the process of interpretation to Charles Ruas:

> I introduced a whiteman and remembered the tar. The fact that it was made out of tar and was a black woman, if it was made to trap a black man -- the white man made her for that purpose. That was the beginning of the story. Suppose

> somebody simply has all the benefits of what the white western world had to offer what would the relationship be with the rabbit who really comes out of a briar patch ? (Ruas. 226).

In order to investigate these and other problems, the woman in the role of the tar baby must adhere thoroughly to the Euro-American values, ideals and way of life and she, therefore, has to be a cultural orphan with no memories of the Black American history nor the protection of the community. And Jadine in Tar Baby is just such a character; when Son, the fugitive Black intruder, the 'rabbit from the briar patch' asks her where her home is, Jadine replies "Baltimore, Philadelphia, Paris" (148). This is an indicator of her rootlessness. Educated at Sorbonne in art history and the European tradition she is dispossessed and far removed from the cultural heritage of her race and has thereby lost her "true and ancient properties" (263), to the preservers of which the novel is dedicated. The extent of her alienation is evident from her initial response to Son, which is in many ways similar to that of Margaret, the White mistress of the house. As frightened by his sudden entry and as outraged by Valerian's generosity towards him as Margaret, Jadine is stunned by the fugitive's "wild, aggressive, vicious hair that needed to be put in jail; uncivilized, reform-school hair" (97). She calls him names such as "ape" and "nigger" and even "ugly bare foot baboon" (103-4) and tells him in a fury:

> Sydney was right. He should have shot you on the spot. But no. A whiteman thought you were a human being and should be treated like one. He's civilized and made the mistake of thinking you might be too. That's because he didn't smell you. But I did and I know you're an animal because I smell you.
>
> (104)

Imputing the wild and animal traits to him as other, she reveals how far she has internalized the value and concepts of her patrons and their Euro-American comrades who, in turn, have appropriated her into the world of modeling as 'the copper Venus' (98).

It is due to this alienation that she provokes the hostility of the woman-in-yellow who spits at her and that of the swamp women who refuse to accept her as a "run away child [...] restored to them" when they see her fighting "to get away from them" (157). These women and the night women of Eloe know their ancient properties of womanhood and their significant role in not just their history but that of the world. As the narrator puts it, they were mindful "of their value, their exceptional femaleness, knowing as they did that the first world of the world had been built with their sacred properties: that they alone could hold together the stones of pyramids and the rushes of Moses's crib [...]" (157). They can hold the world together, performing thereby, the positive function attributed by

Morrison to the concept of the tar baby which Jadine is incapable of fulfilling. The novelist, therefore, has commented on this tragic element of the character. "The tragedy of the situation was not that she [Jadine] was a Tar Baby but that she wasn't. She could not know, she could not hold any thing to herself" (Ruas.226). She therefore remains as much a wandering orphan at the end of the novel as at the start and realizes that there are "no more dreams of safety" (250).

Jadine's alienation from her cultural heritage begins at home where she is brought up by Sydney and Ondine who are themselves alienated from the ancient culture of the race as they adhere to the discourse of their employers as a result of the Black bourgeois's eagerness for upward social mobility. The loss of racial history and heritage is evident in the way in which Sydney differentiates himself and his people from Son's while articulating his hostility to the latter:

> I know you, but you don't know me. I am a Phil-a-delphia Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name. My people owned drug stores and taught school while yours were still cutting their faces open so as to be able to tell one of you from the other. (140)

These remarks are revealing as they reflect Sydney's adherence to the European contempt for African culture as opposed to the racial pride of the

woman-in-yellow who bears two up-side-down Vs scored into each of her cheeks. Besides, as Linden Peach has pointed out:

> Sydney here exploits the potential of language to carry a multiplicity of meanings, both explicit and implicit. From his self conscious pronunciation of the word Phil-a-delphia to the way superiority is attached to written culture through the emphasis on the word book,to his derogatory description of the ethnic tradition of facial adornment. (76)

These prejudices reveal the extent to which Sydney and his family are removed from their roots. They have come to identify more with their employer's than with their own culture as Mbalia (71) has pointed out and therefore they refuse to reflect on their own past or that of their community transferring the same inauthenticity to their niece Jadine. Sydney realizes in the end that "the sea spread around him and his wife. They were afloat in it and if removed from the island there was nowhere to land" (201). The island and the patronage of Valerian are the only mooring they can hope for and that requires them to remain his ideal servants.

Valerian Street and Margaret, the two White characters of the novel are as much exiles as the rest. Margaret who is guilty of child abuse and Valerian who discovers too late that he is guilty of innocence are unable to

cope with their past while their ever-expected, ever-absent son seeks refuge in other cultures and environments than those his parents represent.

Son, who questions the inauthenticity of these exiles and intrudes into their lives is unable however to function in the role of the spiritual guide as Pilate does in Song of Solomon as he is himself an exile fleeing from his personal past and finding refuge in rootlessness:

> [He] was dwelling on his solitude, rocking in the wind, adrift. A man without human rites, unbaptized, uncircumcised, minus puberty rites or the formal rites of manhood. Unmarried and undivorced. He had attended no funeral, married in no church, raised no child. Propertyless, homeless, sought for but not after [...]. (142)

Isolated as he is from his people and deprived of all human rites, he does retain the deeper values acquired early from Eloes such as fraternity and a capacity for compassion even as Pilate had done. But like the tar baby in the tale, Jadine traps him with her strong toil of grace and leaves him almost incapable of choosing his own home town against the inauthentic future that she offers. However, Therese, one of the women who knew their ancient properties, provides him with a chance to identify with the blind slaves from the island's mythic past. Though his choice at the very end remains

inconclusive, there is a hint of home coming -- an escape into the briar patch -- in his final run towards the hills.

Even as Armstrong's Slash and Culleton's April Raintree were written from a need to revise, recount and reclaim the past, Morrison wrote Beloved (1987), her most obviously historical novel, in order to explore a past which is "disremembered and unaccounted for" (Morrison Beloved 274), and to analyse the complex impact of the most consequential experience from which the history of Black people begins in America, slavery. According to her, slavery must be called more than an ideology or an economy: it is also a pathology, the effects of which are still to be reckoned with. Beloved, therefore, is set in the post civil war - reconstruction era in a small town in Ohio where former slaves and freed slaves realize that the past is inescapable.

Being one of the most thoroughly researched novels of Morrison, since it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, Beloved has been described variously as a ghost story, a gothic romance, a holocaust novel, a feminist novel and so on. But, essentially, it is a novel which deals with an attempt of the Afro-Americans to live with and survive the past. Based on the actual events in the life of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave, who, faced with imminent capture, had attempted to murder her four children and succeeded in killing one, the novel imaginatively invents the life of the woman and her

children, alive and dead. The novelist analyses it from the context of slavery and also presents a controversial reincarnation of the dead daughter who returns to claim her due.

The return of Beloved as the reincarnated spirit of Sethe's murdered daughter and her presence in the world of the living has prompted some critics to regard the novel as a mere ghost story where the ghost distracts the attention of the novelist from the other characters and renders the plot melodramatic. Ann Snitow, to take an example, considers the ghost of Beloved as an inadequate symbol at best:

> She [Morrison] harps so on the presence of Beloved, sometimes neglecting the mental life of her other characters. Their vitality is sacrificed to the inert ghost till the very end [...] Beloved is, of course, what's heavy in all their hearts. But can the ghost of a tragically murdered two-year-old bear this weight of meaning? [...] the ghost is too light to symbolize the static fact of her own death. (Snitow 26)

But the presence of Beloved implies much more than the weight of the memory about a murdered infant. Beloved, in fact, revives more of the unspeakable past than the infant could ever have known in her short life. She is, in Freudian terms, the "something repressed that recurs,"[4] the

representative of the buried and woeful past of the "sixty million and more" to whom the novel is dedicated.

That she embodies the collective memory of all the victims of slavery as well as that of Sethe's dead daughter, is evident from her forceful, if fragmented, inarticulate and sometimes incoherent, thoughts and impressions; she reminds Sethe of her (Sethe's) mother for instance with the question: "Your woman she never fix up your hair ?" (60) though it is but a fading memory from Sethe's own long lost girlhood. Again, her memory of her existence in "the other place" before she wills herself into the world of the living has many a hint of the experience of first generation slaves on a ship during the middle passage, where the "Men without skin" [Whitemen] barely take the trouble to keep their 'cargo' alive:

> I am always crouching the man on my face is dead his face is not mine [...] the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none [...] some one is thrashing but there is no room to do it in if we had more to drink we could make tears we cannot make sweat or morning water so the men without skin bring us theirs [...] we are all trying to leave our bodies behind. (210)

These confused ideas, impressions and recollections, so complex in the shifting of pronouns, identities and bodily parts (and written with spaces in between words but no punctuations) reveal the fluid perceptions of an infant's sub-conscious, as well as the collective unconscious of the race. Apart from the sensual and the sexual then, the psychological and even the supernatural are manifestations of history in Morrison's fiction.

"Beloved is also the agent that forces Sethe to confront her personal past, her ambivalent innocence and guilt and triggers the "unspeakable thoughts unspoken" (199). While the past is ever with her, "rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes [...] in shameless beauty" (6), making her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. She "worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe" (199). She guards her memory, beats it back and holds it at bay, not only because "every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost" (58) but also because of the conviction that it was out there in the world as rememory waiting with its implicit threat for her children. She warns her surviving daughter Denver:

> Some day you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think its you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no, its when you bump into a rememory t hat belongs to somebody else [...] The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there--you who never was there--if you go there and stand in the

> place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never.
>
> (36)

And though she yields to Paul. D's question about a newspaper report of her crime and tells him her story, in narrative loops, that circle the subject repeatedly, even as she walks in circles around the room and him, it is to Beloved that she finally explains it with the ironic refrain "and I don't have to explain a thing" (200). In spite of her attempt to meet the claims of the past by yeilding her whole self to Beloved, these claims become bottomless as Beloved, profoundly dislocated and confused by what she remembers as Sethe's rejection of her, yearns without limits for reconnection and restoration. Sethe is rescued from the retribution of her past by the same community of Black women who had ostracized her when she had proudly refused to seek expiation for her crime.

If Beloved manifests Sethe's past, Denver is her present and her hope for future. As outraged by her absence from her mother's past as Beloved is by her exclusion from the present, she accepts Beloved eagerly as her sister 'and something more'. But she also helps her mother to survive the deadly effects of the past by realigning her to the community.

The text merges individual acts of remembrances with the larger communal memory. In addition to Sethe's haunting past, the memories of Paul D, who "wishes to put his story next to hers" (273), and those of Baby Suggs, Stamp Paid, Ella, Nan and many more are embedded in the multivocal narrative which Bernard Bell (1992) contrasts with the univocal nineteenth century slave narratives. As he points out, in the twenty-eight unnamed sections of the novel, "the passion and power of memory ebb and flow in a discontinuous multivocal discourse of the present with the past" (Bell 10). This interaction of the present and the past is retained by means of images, sensory impressions, metaphors and allusions repeated with the force of obsessions: the ghost-white stairs, the smell of burning hair, faces of boys in the trees, Sethe's wrought iron back with the tree-shaped scars, the clearing in the wood where Baby Suggs preached, all trigger the past into the present. Both the ironically named plantation Sweet Home and the haunted house 124 are packed with grim personal memories despite their differences confirming the truth of Baby Sugg's words that there is "not a house in the country [that] ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (5).

It is this grief and the uncommon efforts of her people to come to terms with it that Morrison dramatises in this "Neo-slave narrative or Multivocal remembrances of things past" as Bell calls it in the title of his illuminating analysis of the novel.

The three representative authors under study, Jeannette Armstrong, Beatrice Culleton and Toni Morrison, despite their cultural differences, have stressed the need to revise and reclaim the past of their people. They have each presented in their novels the efforts of their people to survive the trauma of the past and derive strength and resilience from its wisdom in order to resist the many levels of prejudice and oppression meted out to them by the dominant Euro-centric Society.

Notes

1. Morrison comments on how the Whites had to reconstruct everything, in an interview as quoted by Rebecca Ferguson in "History, Memory and Language in Toni Morrison's Beloved". Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice. Susan Sellers. OUP 1991. The Americans Fear of the past has also been commented on by James Baldwin in 'Notes' to A Native Son (1955) London and Sydney: Pluto Press. 1985. 6.

2. Diana Brydon also comments on the idea of oppression as a mere trope for cultural practices and observes that there is a 'wealth' in the commonwealth's rich building on the myth of poverty and the lack of myths. In "Common Wealth or Common Poverty ? The New Literatures in English and the New Discourse of Margianlity." Post Colonial Criticism. ed. Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin.Spec. Issue of Kunapipi. 11 1 1989, 6.

3. Paula Gun Allen refers to the opposing stereotypes of the native, both romantic and negative as "the howling and the noble savage." Quoted by Margery Fee in "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette

Armstrong's Slash and Beatrice Culleton's "April Rain tree". Native Writers and Canadian Writing, ed. W.H. New. Vancouver: UBC Press. 1990.

4. Freud speaks of the repressed thing that recurs in 'The "Uncanny"' (1919) in the std edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. trans. ed. rev. James Strachey. London: Hogart Press, 1971, rpt. in New Literary History, 7, 1976, 619-45.

Conclusion

Binu P.S “Protest and resistance in the works of Morrison, Armstrong and Culleton ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Conclusion

Protest against race, class and gender oppression and resistance to all forms of erasure and misrepresentation have become major concerns for writers from marginalized communities all over the world. The three ethnic women novelists studied here, Toni Morrison, Jeannette Armstrong, and Beatrice Culleton, have used their fictional works as the means of articulation to depict the traumatic experiences of their people in the unequal power structure of the racist, sexist American Society. Each of them has pointed to the significance of cultural resistance in order to decolonize the minds and spirit of the people and to challenge, thereby, the evils of racial indoctrination and discrimination.

The distinct socio-cultural context from which each of these novelists writes has influenced the novels profoundly, but the similarities in the themes they have explored, the methods used , and the resolution of issues pointed at are striking. My effort in this thesis has been to pinpoint these parallels which in turn suggest the possibility of a collective cross-cultural struggle against social inequalities and the potential of literature as an effective weapon in such a struggle.

The colonization of the First Nations people in Canada and the marginalization of the Afro-Americans in the dominant Euro-American society, the use of political, economic and cultural oppression for the purpose, the consequent conditions of existence and their impact on the life and behaviour of the victims , the need of the victimized people to overcome inauthenticity , rootlessness, self hatred and violence by relocating, redefining and reclaiming their traditional values and cultural heritage as a means of resistance etc., are some of the important issues explored by the three novelists. I have analysed them under three separate headings.

In the chapter named, " Towards an Authentic Self ", the ideological conquest and indoctrination of the various marginalized races in America and Canada and the consequent internalization of oppression by the oppressed themselves are interpreted in terms of their impact on the psyche of the victims . The quest and struggle of such people in search of an authentic identity- -personal as well as communal - - are also outlined . The racist indoctrination of the colonized / enslaved people about their supposed inferiority and inefficiency, as defined by the oppressor, is accomplished by the creation and propagation of stereotypes conveyed through the media , literary and historical representations , cultural and commercial symbols and the very process of education. Through these means the Myths of the inherent superiority of the dominant race and the desirability of their views, values , way of life and even their physical appearance and skin colour are presented to the people being indoctrinated . The school in town described

in Slash and the picture books that April Raintree reads as a child serve this purpose. So do the white dolls, Shirley Temple cups and Mary Jane candies in The Bluest Eye and Jadine's university education in Tar Baby. As a result of such ideological oppression , the victims are made to feel ashamed of their identity and their traditional way of life and beliefs , their language, religion and culture.

The choice of assimilating the values and ideals offered by the dominant discourse seems desirable and even inevitable to the distorted vision of individuals subject to indoctrination . This accounts for Pecola's yearning for the bluest pair of eyes and April Raintree's desire to 'live White' , Macon Dead's ambition to beat the White men at their own game of acquiring wealth in Song of Solomon and Jimmy's attempt to be successful on the Whiteman's terms in Slash. While such characters are shown to accept the integrationist path, alienating themselves from their cultural roots in the process , others , like Slash , Cheryl Raintree and Guitar who are able to see through the fake notion of well being through assimilation and therefore reject that choice , are left with self- doubt , frustration , anger and debilitating hatred . This often leads them into perversions and destructive behaviour which render them incapable of functioning effectively in the society. Since those who attempt assimilation also realize in course of time the impossibility of achieving their ideals in a society which is also infected with racism , the 'choice' between assimilation and extermination turns out in effect to be a non-choice.

The double marginalization experienced by women under the racist, sexist hierarchy is yet another common concern of the three novelists . Armstrong presents the plight of such women through the point of view of her male narrator while the other two writers allow them the centre stage and a narrative voice to articulate their experiences, or the omniscient narrator assumes the persona of a woman trying to comprehend/ come to terms with the tragedy of other women as in April Raintree, The Bluest Eye and Beloved. Attention is also drawn to the gestures on the part of such women to achieve gender solidarity and to lead their people to strength and resilience . The two Canadian writers , have not indeed presented grand matriarchs such as Morrison's Pilate (Song of Solomon), Baby Suggs (Beloved) and Therese (Tar Baby). But they have hinted at the innate strength and healing potential of women through such characters as Maeg and her mother in Slash and the old woman at the Friendship Centre in April Raintree . Most of these novels are concluded on a prophetic note suggesting the possibility of decolonising and healing the mind and spirit of the victims of ideological oppression . This involves a choice other than those of integration and oblivion. Not a return to the mythic past or a precolonial state of existence but a process of struggle to draw strength and resilience from traditional moorings and to adapt themselves for a fruitful role in future. In such a struggle , according to these writers , lies the possibility of healing the psyche of their people who would finally be able to realize and claim for themselves a true and authentic identity . Slash's

enlightenment and April's plans at the end of the novel point to such a struggle, while Claudia McTeer's resilience, Milkman's liberation , Son's homecoming and Sethe's reluctant preparation to claim herself denote gestures of reclaiming the authentic self.

"Function of Violence" is an attempt to comprehend and interpret the frequent incidence of violence in the novels under study. These range from the violence perpetrated by the oppressor to subjugate the colonized / marginalized races, to the acts of outrage which are the results of material as well as ideological oppression and the consequent frustration and perversion of the victim's psyche . This latter group includes the destructive acts of the oppressed turned against themselves and their own as well as counter violence directed against the oppressors. Some of these acts of violence, physical, moral psychological and symbolic are destructive in nature while others are more or less necessary and are fructifying in effect. The methods used by the novelists in their works to counter the violence of representation are also explored in this chapter.

As a narrative which records the struggle of the native people in Canada and the US against colonialism , Armstrong's novel details the physical, moral and rhetorical violence used as a means of suppression, even as Culleton focuses on the use of emotional and psychological violence as a means of ideological oppression, since her novel depicts the impact of such oppression on the mind and character of the two Metis

sisters . Toni Morrison has presented the use of brute force and various other types of violence for subjugation in her novels , especially in Song of Solomon, through the memory of the southern Negroes, and more so in Beloved which renders imaginatively the outrages of the era of slavery.

Intra-racial violence has rightly received greater attention in these novels than inter-racial violence. Slash's fury in the knife - slashing scene which earns him his nickname and Cheryl's dissipation at the end of her life can be characterized as self violence even as Sethe's crime of infanticide in Beloved is extended self violence. Equally frequent are the acts of transferred violence where the victims of racist and other forms of oppression transfer their outrage and fury against those less privileged than themselves . The women and children of the racially marginalized communities are the most victimized by this kind of violence. The violence in the life of Mardi in Slash and of Nancy and the like in April Raintree belong to this category. Pecola and Pauline in The Bluest Eye and Ruth and her daughters in Song of Solomon are also prey to such transferred violence . The acts of counter violence range from political agitations in Armstrong's novel and protest of Cheryl Raintree against all forms of misrepresentation to Claudia's dismembering of the Christmas dolls and Guitar's fanaticism.

Some of the gestures of resilience and resistance on the part of individuals and groups under duress have also acquired the force of counter violence . The silence with which April retaliates the verbal violence

of the DeRosiers is an instance in point and so are Circe's revenge in Song of Solomon and the gestures of resistance by the Okanagan community in Slash. Some of the violent scenes in these novels are transformed by the narrative into positive acts of resistance or liberation, self expression or escape, exploration or even enlightenment, while others (the rape of Pecola and the murder of Beloved for instance) are contextualised and qualified by the depiction of the force of circumstances , often traumatic and unnatural , which lead up to these events. This enables the novelists to place such acts of violence in the right perspective and prevents the misinterpretation of such acts as instances of inherent savagery

The violence of misinterpretation practised by the dominant discourse has also been countered by these novelists through the very process of writing for their people. Thus Toni Morrison violates a Dick and Jane primary reader picture of an idealized White American middle class family in The Bluest Eye to reveal the inapplicability of their values in Black American life. She also appropriates the traditional romance quest framework in Song of Solomon to present an Afro-centric world view. Similarly the two Canadian writers appropriate the first person narrative placing a native/Metis protagonist in the centre. Such counter thrusts are significant as gestures of resistance

"Reclaiming the Past" deals with a very destructive aspect of oppression, the distortion and erasure of the history of the oppressed

people by the oppressors by means of misrepresentation , stereotyping or total negation . The necessity of coming to terms with the past - - individual and communal - - and revising and reclaiming the past as a means of strengthening and healing their people have also been explored by the three novelists.

To rescue the history of the American Indian movement from misconceptions and misrepresentation was the very purpose of Jeannette Armstrong in writing Slash . And though a completely objective representation of the experience of history is impossible, she provides the native's perspective, an alternative view, of the history of her people in the sixties and seventies. Slash's personal past is intertwined with that of the Okanagan community (and of all the First Nation's people in general) as he strives to come to terms with it before stepping in to the future . Beatrice Culleton presents the attitudes of her characters to personal and communal history and its impact on their mind and behaviour . April's rejection of the past due to the remembered misery of her childhood and Cheryl's idealization of the past based on the fantasy about her family in a precolonial state of existence determine their respective character and therefore the movement of the plot.

All the novels by Toni Morrison are informed with a deep awareness of Black American history. Through the first four novels she depicts the history of her people in the successive decades of the 20th century while

Beloved presents an imaginative reconstruction of the era of slavery. Moreover, while the Bluest Eye can be read as Claudia's attempt to come to terms with the tragic history of Pecola Breedlove and thereby the collective history of her people, Milkman's quest is as much an attempt to uncover his ancestral history as it is a search for identity. Tar Baby presents a group of characters Black and White struggling to face and to come to terms with their past. It is in Beloved, however , that the powerful presence of the past , its impact on the present and the need to reclaim it through the act of 're memory' are made most obvious.

The three novelists have also contrasted the linear concept of time developed by people who are inspired by the Euro-centric materialistic values that tempt them to leave the past behind, and the cyclic concepton (an awareness of the presentness of the past and its continuity into future) which is characteristic of those who internalize traditional values and are aware of their cultural and communal history. Such people (who draw strength and resilience from the past) are able to resist most effectively the evils of oppression and discrimination.

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