

THE POETICS OF HORROR IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVELS

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by candidate

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DEDICATION

To my father Cassien Nyandwi-Bucumi,

To my mother Gemma Buziya

For your love, guidance and inculcation from my early childhood of the import of education for society in general and for a human being in particular to achieve self-discovery

To you brothers and sisters

To you my dear wife Claudine Nzigamiye and my little beloveds:

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Aimé-Noël Florent Maniraganje

For the struggle and the pain you led to keep the household stand during my entire absence from home

To all those who are struggling for the restoration of justice and equity in the world

This Dissertation is entirely part and parcel earmarked for You all.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the narrative complexities and horror incidents that Toni Morrison employs in her fiction to discuss the socio-cultural dilemma of the African American existence. It focuses on the writer's selected novels whose narratives are built upon horror: *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Love*. The discourse of horror in Morrison's fiction provides an important space in the representation of the African American experience. The deployment of a profusion of narrative strategies and terrifying instances projects a horror world that depicts the pain and the struggle of the African American community. These works are essentially constructed using horror as a strategy to explore the painful history of black existence. The study aims at examining the role and significance of horror and the related narrative devices of disruption and disconnectedness employed in the texts to reveal the effects of social exclusion. It evolves on the assumption that horror provides an alternative perception of the experience of the African American society. It is essentially guided by the psychoanalytic concepts of 'The Uncanny' and 'Abjection' propounded by Freud and Kristeva to understand the characters' violent reactions that emanate from the return of the repressed frustrations and the horrifying instances caused by moral disgust. The study also relies on Propp's 'Functions of dramatis personae' to examine the narratological processes that generate a strange world in the narrative constructions of the selected texts. It employs a qualitative approach that enables us to identify characters with unusual behaviour and the reasons that motivate them to act uncannily. This study establishes that the discourse of horror in Toni Morrison's novels centres primarily on the problematic issues of alienation and subordination to represent the historical pain of the African American existence. The writer deploys the grotesque as part of horror centred on black characters to reveal the destruction of black humanity. Her novels employ disruptive flashbacks that provide the reader a significant background information and context for an appropriate understanding of the texts. The deployment of the narrative device of defragmentation in the texts serves to connect the fragmented identities that were disrupted by the rigidity of the painful hardships. The narrative construction indicates that disconnectedness in character design affects black characters and most significantly the female ones to decry the self-alienation caused by the phallogocentric structure that debases the African American woman. The setting design reveals that an individual's experience of a given space keeps changing whenever body and mind experience new forms of violence, oppression or elation. In general, Morrison deploys horror in her writings to condemn the fragmentation of the African American society caused by racial marginalisation, phallogocentrism and the degeneration of cultural values. The study recommends a further investigation of the relation between horror and magical realism in the writer's writing to establish similarities as well as differences that exist between the two genres in the representation of the historical African American experience.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Horror: Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1933) describes horror as a situation of anxiety that materialises through fear and terror. In Lovecraft's view, these instances of horror are guiding principles of suspense that prompts the fear of the unknown. The concept 'Horror', in this study, relates to the chaotic landscape that dominates the texts under study to reveal the alienation caused by racial marginalisation and phallocentrism in the African American community. This study borrows Lovecraft's conception of horror to approach the writer's texts with regard to the fear and terror portrayed in her novels. Basically, the exploration of the effects of horror observed through characters' actions is based on an artistic approach of the intricate narrative constructions and the appalling incidents deployed in the novels to identify the writer's motivations of the choice of horror, its nature, meaning and function in the representation of the historical African American experiences.

Universal horror: This study on horror adopts the concept 'universal horror' to denote the type of horror that dominates the selected texts where events and situations portrayed in the novels' incidents have a certain connectedness with the rational world. Incidents used in this horror are taken from the everyday occurrences. In this category of universal horror, there is neither fantasy nor events that do not exist or have natural reference in the actual environment. Putting very simply, the concept relates to Morrison's horror world which borrows incidents from human social interactions, cultural traditions and social norms.

Unconventional horror: Unlike the universal horror which pervades Morrison's fiction, the 'unconventional horror' is limited in its scope. In this study, the concept denotes the type of horror that the writer deploys in her narratives and which has no

actual reference in the natural world. It basically emanates from Morrison's 'free imagination' of incidents, situations and circumstances that have no rational existence in the real world. This study does not consider this category of horror as a supernatural fiction though it escapes the boundaries of the rational world. Supernatural literature, in its magical aspect, presupposes an existence of its imagined incidents, characters, symbols and images in the real world. This aspect does not apply to unconventional horror. The unconventional horror is a free form of the writer's imagination featured by a lack of connection to the real world. It is this feature that makes it different from the supernatural horror. In its workings, there is neither physical nor mental identification of an existing referent in the rational world.

Poetics of horror: In this study, the concept 'poetics' refers to the art and technique that characterise Morrison's design and use of horror instances in her novels. Particularly, in this dissertation, the term refers to the narrative and artistic constructions that foreground horror in the texts under study. This concept underlies the outstanding aim of this research based on Morrison's works.

Abjection/the object: In the Kristevian psychoanalysis, 'abjection' is a basic concept used to designate a mental state that threatens, upsets, disturbs, and undermines an individual's psychological identity to create moral disgust; the critic locates the object in the space between the individual's self and object but belonging to none of the two. Kristeva (1982) indicates that the object is neither subject nor object; rather, it is something that "disturbs identities, systems and social order" (p.4). This term 'abjection' is central to the theoretical design of this study and designates the psychoanalytic concept of abjection that guides in part the analytical process to reach research findings.

The Uncanny: ‘The Uncanny’ is a concept that has been explored by Sigmund Freud in his critique ‘The Uncanny’ (1919). In this study, ‘The Uncanny’ is a psychoanalytic concept that supports Kristeva’s abjection in the analytical process of the texts. The basic substance of the concept indicates that the feeling of fear and terror that we generally experience is a result of the presence of the return of the repressed which was once known and familiar with us before it was held back into our unconscious. By the time it resurfaces, it appears strange causing shock and trepidation. This theoretical concept assists in the interpretation of the painful memories that drive black characters to react violently against each other and against their own bodies.

Heimlich/ Unheimlich: In the working process of ‘The Uncanny’, these concepts are very essential. They denote respectively what is familiar and unfamiliar with regard to the circumstances that happen to an individual. ‘Unheimlich’, a German word meaning ‘the unfamiliar,’ relates to something uncomfortable, gloomy, or ghastly which disturbs an individual’s psychological state; this concept is opposed to ‘Heimlich’ which designates something ‘familiar’ having qualities of intimacy and capable to make an individual feel home (Freud, 1919). This study adopts the use of ‘familiar’ and ‘unfamiliar’ to make agreement with the English language which guides all the research tasks.

Jouissance: Literally understood as ‘happiness’ or ‘bliss’ in English, *Jouissance* is a French concept applied by Julia Kristeva in her seminal psychoanalytic treatise *The Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). This concept is central to the psychoanalytic concept of abjection which jointly guides this study with ‘The Uncanny’ and Propp’s Functions of dramatis personae (1968). According to Kristeva,

when an individual's abject self has reached the highest state of grief for a long time and without a notable way out, it results in '*jouissance*' which is a sensation akin to a psychological joyousness caused by an uncontrolled deepest mental depression. Because of a perpetual agony that lasted long and never got treatment for an effective healing, the painful state of the victim gradually disappears till it completely vanishes as their psychological feeling has become numb. It is this mental state of a figurative disappearance of the pain that Kristeva terms *jouissance*. The pain has not actually disappeared as the individual is still subject to the same cause. But due to an excessive accumulation of frustrations caused by unsolved problems, his psychologically painful state turns into a sort of apparent pleasure that drives him to forget temporarily his distress. Characters whose agony has attained this state of *jouissance* become too violent as the ego has turned cold; they undertake terrible actions because their egos are no longer able to manage the demands of the id in order to hold back their frustrations. It is the overwhelmed state of *jouissance* that prompts Sethe to murder her baby rather than let her be taken back by schoolteacher to suffer again the cruelty of slavery (*Beloved*, p. 39). It is the same state of *jouissance* that forces Eva to sacrifice her leg so as to find solution to the financial issues of poverty she is experiencing (*Sula*, p.49). In this study, *jouissance* assists to psychoanalyse the abject minds of characters that oblige the subjects to undertake venturesome and cruel tasks such as manslaughter, suicides and self-mutilations.

Narrative disruption: Fludernik (2009) describes narrative and narration as two essential concepts in the storytelling either in fiction or history. The narratologist argues that narrative and narration imply the creation and telling of a story with logical "successive stages that keep at bay the chronology intricacies of flashbacks, broken and disorganised structures" (p.22). In contrast to Fludernik's argument,

‘narrative disruption’ reverses the logicity of the narrative process. It breaks the ordinary textual unity to create a particular effect. Morrison’s disruption is based on a profusion of flashbacks and intentionally broken stages in the narration that render the plot complex. A reader expects a story to evolve in the way it has started; yet, it abruptly veers to a different point which moves away from the beginning of the story to create some sort of disorientation. This narrative strategy creates reversal and estrangement due to an unexpected change in which characters’ reactions often result in terror. In this study, the narrative strategy of disruption examines the textual interruptions that Morrison introduces in her writing to disrupt the ordinary construction of the narratives in the selected texts.

Narrative ambiguity: Narrative ambiguity or ambiguity in narration relates to the plurality in meaning that Morrison introduces in the texts. This plurality in meaning places the audience into a state of confusion to identify the appropriate message the writer wants her readers to consider. The obsession in wealth to achieve socio-economic independence and the dedicated pursuit for ancestral roots by Milkman Dead in *Song of Solomon*, for instance, blur the protagonist’s chief mission in the narrative. Narrative ambiguity functions as a narrative device to disrupt the narrative’s progressive meaning.

Aesthetics of defragmentation: In this dissertation, narrative defragmentation or aesthetics of defragmentation denotes a narrative procedure that Morrison initiates in the texts to mitigate the gravity of pain that characters have been experiencing: it creates a soothing atmosphere in the text by reducing the psychological strain that they were enduring. Defragmentation occurs as a process of rebirth and healing of the disrupted and fragmented identities of characters whose physical, moral or

psychological damages have converted them into alien individuals. It therefore functions as a therapy to relieve the broken hearts and heal the wounds caused by racial marginalisation.

Character disconnectedness: Similar to narrative disruption, disconnectedness is also a narrative technique that results from narrative intricacies (Fludernik, *ibid.*) with regard to character construction. This expression refers to the disintegrating state of Morrison's black characters. Some African American narratives portray white characters as an evil and destructive force of black existence. Yet, in Morrison's novels, some black characters are portrayed as social misfits or rebels against the communal African American cause. Commonality is put under threat. Character disconnectedness in this study discusses therefore the narratives' lack of cohesion between black characters and the tragic reactions that result from the disintegrating and misunderstanding atmosphere.

Place: The concepts place, space and time are crucial terms in the analysis of Morrison's design of setting paradigms. In this research, 'place' relates to the societal consideration a character acquires within the boundaries of the society to which they belong.

North-South: The dichotomy 'North-South' is a recurrent motif that pervades the narrative thread of *Beloved* right from the beginning to the end. The South which spatially refers to Kentucky and all the Southern slave states (in the novel and in the study) is metaphorically used in this thesis to denote the racial oppression, the human objectification that slaves endure and the hegemonic mindset of the white chauvinism. The North is, however, employed in this study to relate to the freedom slaves recover by the time they cross Ohio River and settle in Cincinnati, Ohio which is a free state.

In this context, the North denotes freedom, autonomy, emancipation and social integration for the franchised slaves while the South is used to insinuate pain, cruelty, disintegration and racial alienation.

The Reconstruction: Toni Morrison's fifth novel *Beloved* is temporally set in 1873. This year corresponds to the historically political period that the Union Government of America called Reconstruction. The Reconstruction was a Government's project designed to rehabilitate the South that had been devastated by the Civil War (1861-1865). The failure of this project to grant the promised emancipation for a complete socio-political integration of the freed black slaves as American citizens brought more oppression than ever. Morrison's inspiration of the novel sprouted from the horrors of the return to a new form of slavery caused by the collapse of the Reconstruction project. Being a historical novel, the writer sets it into this dubious time to draw the role of history in human existence. This historical concept 'The Reconstruction' directs readers to locate the context of the narrative's incidents into the period of their occurrence in order to understand the historicity of the plot settings and other related elements that construct the story.

Underground Railroad: Furtively conceived after the passing of the restraining Slave Act of 1850, the Underground Railroad was not in reality a railroad; it was a network of secrecy routes that were organized by Northern white abolitionists and freed slaves to assist the slaves of the South to escape and join the free North unharmed. It was called 'Underground' because the conception and execution of the assistance was done in total secret for fear of being intercepted and caught by the bigot Southern slave-owners and the white authorities of the North. This concept resonates in *Beloved*'s plot and therefore in Chapter Five of this Thesis. There is need

to understand the concept first in the novel and second in this study as well. By the time Sethe escapes the South, she is assisted by the white girl Amy Denver to deliver a baby to whom the mother attributes the name 'Denver' in honour of the girl who provided her invaluable assistance (p. 92). It is the same white girl Amy Denver who assists Sethe to cross the River Ohio so as not to be captured by her master schoolteacher. Once Sethe succeeds the crossing of the River, she is this time aided by Stamp Paid who escorts her up to her mother-in-law Baby Suggs's home (pp.104-107). Stamp Paid and the white abolitionist Mr. Bodwin are Underground Railroad agents who struggle hard to rescue a lot of vulnerable slaves to leave black emasculation in the South. In this study, the concept Underground Railroad is metaphorically used to relate to the compassion and commonality that characterise the relations of the abolitionists and the enfranchised blacks in *Beloved*.

The grotesque: In art and literature, this concept is loosely approached leaving ambiguity to reach a comprehensive definition. While Chris Baldick (2001) defines the grotesque as a style "characterized by bizarre distortions, especially in the exaggerated or abnormal depiction of human feature..." involving "freakish caricatures of people's appearance and behaviour" (p.108), the *Encarta Dictionaries* (2009) defines the grotesque as "a style of art that mixes the realistic and the fantastic" in the construction of peculiar narratives. With regard to Morrison's grotesque, this study adopts Baldick's conception: it approaches the grotesque in relation to the writer's representations of distorted bodies and the incongruous corporeal deformities of black characters that depict black dehumanisation. In line with this grotesquerie, the study discusses both the 'marked body' and the 'disabled body' of those characters. The marked body relates here to the characters' corporeal distortions from the brutal treatments they have endured. Sethe's deformed back into

a chokecherry tree and her mother's marked bosom in *Beloved* are exemplary cases of corporeal markedness. However, in this study, the disabled body echoes the discussion of the physical and mental disabilities of characters' bodies as Eva's amputated leg (*Sula*, p.49) and Hagar's insanity that triggers her demise indicate (*Song of Solomon*, p.67).

Sethe's 'protection': Used in a paradoxical context, 'protection' in this study refers to the act of infanticide that Sethe commits when she deliberately kills her baby daughter Beloved. In the narrative, Sethe refers to the baby as '*crawling-already? girl*' possibly because the murdered child was only aged eighteen months, that is, not yet ready to walk. Sethe justifies her crime as a protective act of *safety* when she reiterates that she "wanted to keep [her] children in a safe place" where they would be 'protected' against the evils of slavery (p.47).

The Seven Days: In *Song of Solomon*, this is a secret organisation of young black boys whose goal is to avenge the innocent blacks killed by whites. The organisation proportionates the revengeful murders by killing whites in the same number, on the same day and in the similar circumstances the black victims were killed. Guitar Bains who mistakenly kills Pilate while intending to slay Milkman in *Song of Solomon* (p. 340) is a member of this underground network.

The National Suicide Day: In *Sula*, the mentally traumatised and survivor-fighter of World War One Shadrack institutes a commemorative day in his black village of the Bottom—a day that he names 'The National Suicide Day'. The Day reminds the black community of the horrors they endured during the war. This Day is celebrated on every 3rd January. During celebration, Shadrack invites people to descend into streets where he calls them to "kill themselves or kill one another" (p.51)—an appeal that

attests an existence of a psychological affliction that has turned into the Kristevian *jouissance* for the black community.

The Cosey women: In this study, the phrase ‘the Cosey women’ has been coined to refer to the three rival women characters in *Love* who are fighting over the right to inherit Bill Cosey’s possessions. These women are Heed, May and Christine—respectively the widow, the daughter-in-law and the granddaughter to the deceased Bill Cosey.

124: Following *Beloved*’s narrative transcription and therefore applied in this dissertation in the same clipped form, ‘124’ is an abridged writing of *124 Bluestone Road* which is the address of Sethe’s home in Cincinnati, Ohio. Indeed, this home belonged to Sethe’s mother-in-law Baby Suggs until she died. Sethe became the legal manager of the home by the time Baby Suggs had died. It is the house that was raided by schoolteacher to snatch Sethe and her children back to the South. In addition, 124 is the house in which Sethe killed her baby Beloved—suggesting that the home is not a new place to the ghost. It is this home 124 that is haunted by Beloved by the time she returns back as a ghost. When Sethe is released from prison due to the infanticide she has committed, she rejoins the same home 124 where she and her daughter Denver experience a rigid ostracisation from the community of Cincinnati. This abridgement ‘124’ runs across the novel’s narrative and has been adopted in this dissertation accordingly.

Spatial proximity: In Chapter Five of this Thesis, the expression *spatial proximity* or geographical proximity is used to relate to Morrison’s technique in the setting design where the whole or almost all incidents of a narrative occur in one locale or neighbouring places to draw intimacy and connectedness between character and

environment. *Sula* provides a significant case of spatial proximity in that almost all the incidents occur either in the Bottom or in Medallion which are two adjacent villages.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

1.1.1 Introduction

The presence of horror instances in Toni Morrison's novels makes the writer's work a particular fiction whose structure reposes on a terrifying portrayal of the African American struggle amid the cosmopolitan American society. Morrison depicts the hardships of the African American existence in a style that raises dread through various forms that include the supernatural to suggest the adversity of the African American human condition. Horror and fear are innate human feelings that originate from an individual's disturbed identity generally caused by a sudden painful situation that makes one's ego experience a strange psychological breakdown (Kristeva, 1982). Being an expression of anxiety and distress, horror manifests itself through fear.

Morrison's characters undertake venturesome actions that are basically prompted by fear in a way to resist the exploitative and debasing social structure. The writer brings horror in her works as an important tool to approach the socio-cultural challenges that are fragmenting the American society. In its workings, horror reveals an individual's mental state and nurtures the common sense to identify with the world around. It backs the writer's characters to take on indispensable and precautionary measures that assist them to surmount critical situations. The multiple forms of horror in literary texts indicate the various modes of individuals' psychology. Horror in Morrison's novels dramatises the good and evil sides which are permanently at odds, each seeking to defeat the other, thereby creating a chaotic state.

This chapter sets out the foundation upon which this thesis is grounded. As the study seeks to understand the significance of horror in Toni Morrison's fiction, the chapter initially highlights the fundamentals on horror in general and in American literature in particular in order to pave the way to the gist of the study's ultimate goals: the nature, use and meaning of horror in Toni Morrison's novels. The chapter also outlines the important hinges that hold up the structure of the study. Such elements include a research problem, the objectives that the study seeks to achieve, a section on a review of related literature with identified outlets to fill in, the theoretical structure that guides the analysis and the methodology that indicates the relevant tools and techniques employed to collect the appropriate data to be analysed.

1.1.2 The role of horror in art and literature

Different literary forms such as novels, films and visual arts have tried to represent people and society using elaborate techniques embedded in frightening scenes that portray the challenges mankind is experiencing. In many situations, the narratives and the scenic representations of these genres put forth events, incidents and locales that carry uncanny occurrences in which the weird has an important place. For instance, many works of film and modern literature often reveal the destructive forces of human nature on the basis of a horrifying portrayal in which tragic scenes dominate the narrative thread and trace the work's final aims. Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* and Mario Puzo's film *The Godfather* are outstanding epitomes of this peculiar artistic taste. Horror emerges as a vital tool that modern filmmakers and writers utilise to approach social issues that are threatening human existence.

The fundamental question that emerges at the beginning of this study is about the foundations of horror and its implications on art and literature. Scholars are divided

on a common definition of the concept. The general assumption holds that a horror story whether in art or literature must primarily deal with dread. Theresa Hopper (2002) admits that the supernatural is a useful feature in horror fiction but it does not constitute a *sine qua non* to make a story horrific. For Hopper, what is important for a story to be horrific is the degree to which incidents arouse fear and terror in the minds of the audience. Fear and terror are essential elements for a horror story to create suspense; this suspense combines with the “fear of the unknown to produce the final goals of horror in art” (Spadoni, 2007). In fiction, fantasy is also a type of horror “which shocks or even frightens the reader, or perhaps induces a feeling of repulsion or loathing” (Cuddon, 2002: 44). It conveys a message in a style that portrays magnified unrealistic incidents in which fear and irrationality dominate the landscape.

Horror fiction, in modern literature, started with what is today known as Gothic fiction. Prior to this period, horror dominated myths, plastic art and classical drama and poetry. The epic poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by the Greek poet Homer illustrate this heritage. The medieval religious stories which based essentially their teachings on death and the afterlife also applied horror to educate Christians about the agony of sinners once in hell. Due to its old age, horror reveals problematic to establish adequately its origins.

Many scholars trace the roots of modern horror literature in the medieval Roman Catholic judicial institution of Inquisition. The Inquisition, which was the medieval papal court, established a set of rules and codes of conduct that restricted the freedom of those who would trespass against the Church’s canon. Witchcraft, superstition and heresy were cruelly reprimanded. Suspects and culprits of witchcraft and those declared heretics would be burnt alive. Inspired by that terrifying Catholic doctrine of

the time, a lot of literary works of the period portrayed the tribulations of the afterlife which were inspired by the cruel punishments instituted by the Church. Dante Alighieri's eschatological narrative poem *Divine Comedy* (1308) describes appalling scenes of the apocalyptic sufferings that await sinners. Henry Kramer and Jakob Sprenger's *The Hammer of Witches* (1486), a work on the codification of the belief in witchcraft, reinforced Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the creation of scenes that mirrored terror, fear and the weird about the atrocities of hell. This aspect of horror in literature became a vital feature of the Renaissance drama which broke with medieval themes to focus on the socio-political issues that were undermining human existence at the time. In drama as well as in poetry, writers portrayed the socio-cultural challenges of the time in a terrifying style where the supernatural and gore dominated the stage. Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (c.1604), Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c.1585), William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c.1600) and *Macbeth* (c.1605), John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* (1590) are some of the works that employed horror to discuss the socio-cultural issues of the British Renaissance and the following epochs.

These evolving stages in horror especially in the Renaissance drama paved the way to modern horror fiction which emerged with the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole in 1764. The publication of this novel inaugurated a new era in the English Novel and became a foundational stone of horror fiction under the concept of *Gothic fiction*. This novel provided significant inspiration to a wave of writers both inside and outside England. The advent of the Industrial Revolution in England and the progress of science and technology in many fields of life which were perceived as a threat to the traditional ways of life and codes of conduct provided important materials to the new novel. The Eighteenth Century British novel chiefly

drew inspiration from these social transformations. Writers started to explore the rise of a new social order caused by a mechanised life that would affect the social traditions and customs. For the English people, the emergence of the Enlightenment meant nothing but the collapse of society. Horror became an important literary tool for writers to discuss this mechanisation of human existence. Novelists like William Beckford (*Vathek*, 1786), Ann Radcliffe (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794), Matthew Lewis (*The Monk*, 1797), Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*, 1818) and many others were the product of that period. Their writings are characterised by gloom and dismay portraying the hopelessness that society was facing and a doubt for the future. Horror became the prevalent style in the novel which exposed the ‘fear of the unknown’ future that the society was experiencing.

The Twentieth Century and the present-day novel and cinema draw much also on horror to build significant narratives that discuss the current challenges of human existence. Horror often dominates the film narratives as it has greater capacity to gain the attention of the audience than any other sort of film (Metz, 2002:21). Because of its influence on the audience, a lot of horror novels have been adapted into film in order to make horror alive and gain more reception. Novels like Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Stephen King’s *The Gunslinger* (1982), and Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* (1979) have been adapted into film some years after publication. Likewise, some of the Renaissance plays such as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and the Nineteenth century novels like Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861) have also been adapted into film in order to revive the horrifying intensity these works carry with regard to audience.

1.1.3 Basic elements of horror in fiction

The basic constituents of horror are fear and terror which set the foundation of a horror narrative (Lovecraft, 1933:1). These elements are essential for a story to determine the atmosphere of the text in its logical evolution (Carroll, 2002:34). The story generally proceeds upon improbable and unbelievable events which start in a usual way but unfold to end unexpectedly in dreadful situations. Darkness, gloom, and dismay abound the incidents being presented (Punter, 2004: 72). Characters are set to surmount terrifying incidents in which the most powerful and sometimes most endowed with supernatural capacity prey on the innocent victims. There is violence that results generally in gore to reinforce the darkness of the story's atmosphere.

In this fiction, the supernatural often deals with various themes, images, and symbols describing the alterations of the human condition. Duncan (1992:67) contends that horror literature often attempts to unmask the wicked nature of human beings. It is devoted primarily to stories of fear, the fantastic, and the "darker" supernatural forces. According to Duncan, these forces represent the "dark side" of human nature characterised by irrational and destructive drives. Such forces bring the plot action to the highest and most difficult stage to understand within rational thinking. In some cases, the reader is usually guided by what S.T. Coleridge (1998) calls 'Willing suspension of disbelief' in order to relate to the world of the text. Usually, the manifestation of reality from characters is revealed through terrible dreams and visions. Most of these dreams are shocking, picturing a character facing a despicable situation generally leading him to ruin. Such dreams are the result of the character's repressed frustrations which lie in their subconscious to resurface abruptly to cause trepidation (Freud, 1919:217).

In some cases, horror literature is featured by images of graveyards and other sinister elements that reveal ruin and decay to depict the futility and the transient nature of human existence. At the start of *Beloved*, there is a description of the cemetery where Beloved was buried. The description shows dark images of graves covered with snow as the burial takes place in winter (p.11). The novel also relates the context through which the character's name 'Beloved' was chosen, showing how that name cannot be erased or forgotten as it is deeply engraved on the tombstone and powerfully imprinted in her mother's psyche. Same sinister scenes of cemetery appear in *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* where Nel and Ruth Foster pay tribute to the tombs of her childhood friend Sula and her father Dr. Foster respectively. The contemplations and invocations the two characters hold before the graves generate a sombre atmosphere that links the subjects to their departed who lie inside those graves. These dedicated visits to the tombs enact the communication between the living and the dead in which Nel and Ruth idealistically entertain with their departed as if they were interacting with living human beings. There are also images of skeletons of Macon Dead in *Song of Solomon* who died years ago but was left unburied to insinuate the vice of human wickedness and the necessity of retribution to reprimand evil in society. In fact, *Song of Solomon* presents Macon Dead as a victim murdered by his neighbour—a white man—who later usurps his property (p.77). Macon Dead, now in a ghostly form, appears to his children—Macon Jr. and Pilate—and recommends them to avenge him with the similar pain he was inflicted by his murderer.

Often, romance is introduced in a narrative to mitigate the darkness brought by horror incidents. However, this romance may turn either into rewarding love or wicked lust which may generate tragic ends. Usually, the villain *femme fatale* is punished at the end of the story while the distressed damsel is rewarded after harsh tribulations. In

Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Milkman Dead is in deep love with his cousin Hagar; yet when Hagar learns that Milkman has left her forever, she schemes to murder him (p.107). She later goes mad and commits suicide as a result of a betrayed love. In *Beloved*, Paul D entertains a love affair with Sethe. The indigo slave Sixo has an affair with Thirty-Mile Woman who is pregnant with his baby by the time he is burnt alive. Such instances of love are eclipsed by tragic events which bring destruction to the lovers.

In tragedies, heroes have significant features that distinguish them from other characters (Aristotle, 1989, p.43). But in horror fiction, sometimes leading characters are ambiguous: the protagonist is generally found with some serious flaws. In fact, he is likely to incarnate two unrelated natures of good and evil—each counteracting the other. In the beginning of *Song of Solomon*, for instance, Milkman Dead's concern is wealth that he hopes it shall raise his social position beyond the level attained by his father. He is a quiet boy who does not cause trouble in the family. Yet, in the middle of the novel, he is portrayed robbing his Aunt Pilate (p.164). In addition, Milkman is responsible for the death of his cousin Hagar who commits suicide out of his betrayal in love. Yet, the same protagonist is shocked when he learns after some days that Hagar has died. Milkman falls heart-stricken by the time Pilate is shot dead by Guitar Bains. Paradoxically, it was the same Pilate whose house was broken by Milkman to rob the alleged gold she would possess.

Female characters are placed in distressing situations which leave them devastated and helpless. In some cases, the female character is tormented by a male oppressor such as a ruler or a king who forces her to capitulate to his egotistical whims. If the female is a protagonist, she is usually kept marooned. For instance, Pecola in *The*

Bluest Eye is molested twice and impregnated by her own father, Cholly Breedlove. She is later condemned to street life that she ends up miserably.

Isolation, either physical or psychological, is often at the centre of horror narratives. Sethe and her daughter Denver in *Beloved*, Pecola and her mother Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*, and Nel and Shadrack in *Sula* are entrapped and marooned from the company of the other members of the society. Denver is hated both in the neighbourhood and at school because of a crime committed by her mother; and Pecola is socially ostracised due to the shamefully incestuous condition she is entrapped in. The common aspect of this isolation in the writer's novels is that it strikes generally the main characters who are subsequently disoriented and disconnected from within and from the environment around them.

On the whole, this study focuses on the representations of horror in Toni Morrison's novels. It examines horror in the writer's five novels (*Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye* and *Love*) with a specific focus on the artistic and narrative implications it generates to the world of the texts. Morrison employs horror as a means of communication to discuss the challenges that the African American is facing first as a subaltern in the white dominant culture and second as a woman in the patriarchal social structure. The mechanism of use and the related influence horror brings in the texts constitute the core of this study.

1.1.4 The American horror novel

The American horror fiction appeared by the beginning of Nineteenth Century. This genre is credited to Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne who initiated the style with a distance from the European conventions which mostly drew settings from the medieval landscape (Sutherland, 2004). Brown's

Wieland; or the Transformation: An American Tale and *Edgar Huntly* respectively published in 1798 and 1799 are considered the first horror novels ever written in the American fiction (Ibid. April 2004). However, Poe's achievements in American fiction gave a significant recognition of horror in the depiction of American issues of life. His seminal short-story 'The Fall of the House of Usher' attests the role of horror in fiction in that sense. Wright (1945) and Hamilton (1979) consider him a pioneer of the Southern Gothic which utilises horror as a fundamental tool to exhume the hidden realities of the American past. Poe's narrative style in horror combines both a subjective and an objective portrayal of an individual's or society's predicament by adopting a first person narration which is in fact inclusive rather than exclusive. The horror novel was later revived and made popular in the 1920s by William Faulkner especially in his novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930). The Great Migration at the end of the Nineteenth Century, The Great Depression of the 1929 onwards, the two World Wars and the violent Civil Rights movement of the 1950s onwards provided considerable materials in the imagination and representation of terror and fear that pervade this fiction.

The American horror novel puts much emphasis on the problems that American society is confronted with. Writers usually explore the strange behaviour of people and the social inequalities that threaten the modern America. In their works, they emphasize the fragility of social order. Common themes include: poverty, rape, racism, alienation, juvenile delinquency, failing marriages, sexism and gender, scepticism in religious faiths and crime and violence. These themes are embedded in the novels of William Faulkner, Stephen King, Toni Morrison and many others. This fiction is generally set in the South due to its historical past with regard to slavery and racism in America. Settings usually take place in plantations as it is the case of

Beloved which presents, in part, the harsh conditions faced by slaves on the Sweet Home Plantations in Kentucky. Settings may also be located in old localities or broken downtowns. The contrast North-South resonates in these novels mirroring the socio-cultural rift that antagonises the two realms.

Insanity is an important feature in the American novel. Usually, characters are portrayed insane, performing actions that destroy both the lives of their counterparts and their own lives. The insanity of Shadrack and Plum jeopardises their own lives and the community. Plum's mental and physical incapacity preoccupies her mother Eva who chooses to immolate him in a way to abridge temporarily her personal pain deepened by a socio-economic crisis. Madness is also represented in *Song of Solomon* and *The Bluest Eye* in which Hagar loses sense and dies later while Cholly Breedlove goes insane to the point that he sets fire to the family house. Through the imagined characters, writers represent the harm people can do one another and the consequences it generates on the social order. Some characters are portrayed as innocent and there is always a struggle to get a place in the society. Whether insane or not, characters are often portrayed struggling, seeking to make sense of the world around them.

1.1.5 Horror in Morrison's fiction

Some critics of Morrison's work assent that the writer's fiction rests on a twofold art: a literature of both entertainment and enlightenment (Amian: 2008; Smith: 2012). Both types particularly centre the main interest on the experiences of the African American community in a dominant white culture. Morrison often employs horror in the enlightenment fiction with the intent to bring to surface the current issues that haunt the American society. Most significantly, horror becomes an indispensable tool

to reveal the evils of racial discrimination, gender inequalities and class distinctions in America. *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon* and *Sula* discourse in detail on those challenges showing how these issues alienate both the oppressor and the oppressed. To bring about horror in her works, Morrison imagines—among others instances—supernaturalism in which ghosts and superstition create a sinister atmosphere of terror and fear. In *Beloved*, the violent return of Beloved to her family and the sight of a ghost of a white bull that prompts the death of Freddie's mother while giving birth in *Song of Solomon* are some of the supernatural occurrences that generate a horrifying effect in the mind of the reader. Other instances of horror in Morrison's fiction unfold through scenes of insanity, incest and sexual harassment, excessive cruelty, mysterious fires and terrible dreams. In *Sula* for instance, Shadrack suffers from mental depression caused by the aftermaths of World War One. He initiates a 'National Suicide Day' in which he invites people to kill one another or kill themselves. In many of those instances, the writer brings in horror to insinuate the alienation that blacks undergo both from within and from the white community.

1.1.6 Toni Morrison's biographical background

Toni Morrison—née Chloe Ardelia Wofford—was born on 18th February 1931 in Lorain, Ohio (Gillespie, 2008; Lister, 2009). She was the second child in a family of four children. At the age of twelve, she was baptised Catholic and received the name 'Anthony' which later became 'Toni,' her pen name. Although born in a modest family, her parents Ramah Willis and George Wofford gave their daughter an appropriate education. She joined Howard University in 1949 where she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English in 1953. In 1955, she graduated with a Master's from Cornell University. In 1958, she married the Jamaican architect, Harold

Morrison, from whom she acquired the connubial name 'Morrison'. However, the couple divorced after six years (1964) with two children (Lister, *ibid.*).

Morrison's parents had come to settle in Ohio from the South hoping to get a better life different from the racial radicalisation that was hardening living conditions. Gillespie points out that "both sides of Morrison's family had moved North from Southern states as many African Americans did in what was called The Great Migration in search for better economic opportunities and greater freedom from the often violent manifestations of the Southern racism" (*ibid.* p.3). Morrison was born and grew up in the racially divided America during the horrors of The Great Depression and World War Two. That is why most of the incidents and themes in her novels such as *Sula*, *Love* and *The Bluest Eye* portray the pain of African Americans during those times.

In a television interview with journalist Charlie Rose (March 16, 1998), Morrison denied the idea that she writes about her personal experiences. She indicates that it is her "imagination" which guides her artistry, affirming that a writer should strive to have the "ability...to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar" in a way to meet the reader's satisfaction (Lister, *ibid.* p.1). She further admits that much of the imagination for her fiction was from her community where "the language of the African American community of Lorain...would come to infuse her fiction," in which "new language and biblical language and sermonic language and standard language heard in her hometown" shaped her literary insights (*ibid.*, p.2).

Morrison grew up near her father from whom she would regularly listen the ghost stories he used to tell his children. It is from the memories of those stories that most of

her ingenuity sprouts. She has indicated that the source of inspiration of her imaginative capability is based principally on the stories and experiences of her ancestors. As a child, Morrison usually cleaned homes of the white families of Lorain to meet family needs (ibid., p.5). Some of her masters had a good sense of understanding while others were wicked. In these interactions, Morrison learned that human beings incarnate an innate predisposition of good and evil nature. It was from these experiences that she imagined Pauline and Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, a family divided against itself and condemned to self-destruction and disappearance.

As a student at Howard University, Morrison visited the South for her first time in life with the University theater players (ibid., p.3). This discovery added another perspective to the writer's knowledge about the South she had known from her parents' accounts. Her portrayal of the South in her fiction is a result of the personal experiences and historical education she received about the region.

In 1980, Morrison was elected member of the National Council on the Arts and, in 1981, she was honored to become member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a nomination which made her known and prominent in the American literature arena. Morrison's interest in history gave her knowledge of the past of the African American experiences which are reflected in her novels. In the preface to *Beloved* (2004), she mentioned that reading the stories of the "repellant past" on slavery "was to pitch a tent in a cemetery inhabited by highly vocal ghosts" (ibid. p.7).

Although known as novelist (ibid.p.13), Morrison's oeuvre comprises various works including plays, short-stories, children's literature and literary critical essays. Her literary career has been marked by great success thanks to a committed attachment to

the social concerns for Americans in their diversities. In 1993, she was awarded the Noble Prize in Literature. In the view of the Nobel Foundation, her literary achievements credit Morrison as a writer “who, in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality” (December, 1993). Morrison’s perspectives of history have expanded her insights toward the understanding of the world’s challenges. Her works trace a way to a veritable introspection for change. She utilises horror as a tool to facilitate truth to permeate the deepest feelings of the reader. Morrison grew up in the racist, discriminatory and capitalist America—a society which weighed much upon her life and thought. Although her writing touches history at a certain extent, she essentially writes on current issues of the American society. Like other African American writers, Morrison has manifested a great concern for the pain of the African American in general and the black woman in particular. Her fiction longs for change in which she idealises an inclusive America devoid of racial discrimination and other social inequalities whatsoever.

1.1.7 The socio-political and historical context of Morrison’s work

Toni Morrison’s oldest temporal setting in her works appears in *Beloved* which is set in the 1873 America. The spatial settings vary according to the novel’s incidents but the largest part of events takes place in Sweet Home Plantations, Kentucky and at 124 Bluestone, Cincinnati, Ohio. Why does the writer choose to set her work in such a remote time? An answer to this question needs to visit the historical situation of America during that period in order to understand the motivations that led the writer to choose that time.

The 1870s America was the period of the 'Reconstruction' (Du Bois, 1963, p.711). After the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865), the South was severely devastated. All the Southern states were in a situation of political disorder, social ruin and economic decline (Holzer and Gabbard: 2007). Homes, crops, plantations and towns had been destroyed by war. Most significantly, the Southern slave-owners whose economic powers rested on a free slave labour collapsed when slaves got officially liberated. Life became difficult and a platform for reconstruction was advocated by the Union government. The Reconstruction fixed its programme on three major initiatives: the protection and restoration of the Union, the economic rehabilitation of the South by providing fair housing, assistance in food and healthcare to war victims, and a new strong political legislation capable of protecting the newly acquired civil and political rights of the freed slaves (Ortiz, 2005).

The first instruction the Southern states received from the Union government was to abolish slavery immediately in their respective constitutions. Eventually, the most important goal of the Reconstruction was to provide a solid foundation to the rights of the former slaves in order to protect them against the rage of the defeated white slave-owners who would retaliate in the future. Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay *The Conduct of Life* discourses on those issues that were slicing the American society of the time. Being a staunch abolitionist, his essay supported the enfranchisement of the blacks and a recognisable status in the political arena of America. With the objective to curb the influence the Southern whites would have in the coming days over the freed slaves, the Congress passed a number of Acts and Amendments: The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) of the American Constitution officially abolished slavery although this abolition had already been proclaimed earlier in 1863 by the Emancipation Proclamation—yet without notable effect. The Civil Rights Act of 1866

and The Fourteenth Amendment granted American citizenship to the freed slaves. The Fifteenth Amendment gave black men the right to vote while the Civil Act of 1875 attempted to abolish discrimination in public places such as markets, hospitals, schools... (Constitution of the United States, Feb 3, 1870).

The Reconstruction lasted twelve years (1865-1877). However, its results were a mixture of success and failure. It created a situation of great anxieties and distress in the minds of the leading Republicans who wanted a quick real change; the freed blacks saw themselves driven back again to the pain of slavery which re-emerged due to the failure of the Union Government to impose its political powers over the racist whites of the South. In fact, by the end of 1877, the Reconstruction had succeeded in restoring the North and the South into a unified nation, but technically failed to eradicate slavery (Du Bois, *ibid.*, p.713).

In 1877, the then President of the United States Rutherford B. Hayes ordered the Union troops to leave all the Southern states. The departure of the troops weakened the achievements that the Reconstruction had made. It left the 'freed' blacks at the mercy of the angry whites. From the time, the Southern whites gradually started coming back to power. They passed rude codes for blacks—the "Black codes"—which were a series of coercive laws intended to bring back black people to subjugation. Blacks then started living off sharecropping that had been abolished along with slavery. Their socio-political status declined gradually (Drescher, 2009). The enfranchisement and the associated rights and privileges they had acquired from the Reconstruction Acts and Amendments were gone.

The "Black Codes" that the Southern states Congresses passed to curb the rights blacks had obtained from the Reconstruction forbade them, among other rights, the

privilege to make contracts, to testify against whites, to marry white women, get employed in white companies or to visit public places. Any black found breaking the codes was brutally punished to death. Ron Eyerman in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2003) has qualified the Reconstruction a failure and a paradox “as the ‘full and complete’ integration promised by radical Reconstruction gave way to new forms of racial segregation in the South and elsewhere” (p.23). The situation became worse with the birth of the secret white racist movement Ku Klux Klan when it started killing blacks. This organisation was born out of the defeated Southern armies in an attempt to restore the lost powers. The promises of compensations by the Reconstruction for the contributions that blacks had made in the war were never honoured. The sacrifices they made in the war while liberating the South and the enslaving unpaid labour they endured for centuries went unacknowledged.

1873 is the year in which Morrison sets *Beloved*. We have already seen how the Reconstruction went on faltering since the early years of its beginning. Besides its failure, 1873 was a year of national shame—first for all the American citizens and more aching for the deprived blacks who needed special protection. Economically it was a year of national disaster in the Union government in that corruption and overspeculation known as “*Crédit Mobilier of America*” scandal caused a terrible economic ruin at national level (*Microsoft® Student 2009*). Blacks as well as landless whites and immigrants from both the South and North faced a spectacular hike in unemployment to worsen the crisis.

On the other side and especially for the black population, 1873 was a year of sorrow and mourning for the ‘former’ slaves. In that year, the U.S conservative Supreme

Court nullified many of the Civil Rights that had been granted to blacks by the Reconstruction. With the 1873 Supreme Court's resolutions, the American citizenship, the right to vote for blacks and other rights that had been conferred to them were made invalid; and slavery in another form, crueller than the former, returned to last for almost a century. All the hopes for a promising future of blacks were gone. Morrison's *Beloved* set in that year (1873) enacts this hopeless state of blacks. It discusses the painful experiences of racism and the related inhuman abuses they endured within an illusionary independent nation.

While *Beloved* is a historical novel that basically chronicles the painful past of slavery, Morrison's other novels discuss the current issues that are undermining America in various dimensions. The 1950s and '60s America was a period of political turmoil. The racial segregation that had excluded blacks for around four centuries created an acute national concern. Blacks organised massive protests claiming equal consideration and a fair access to national opportunities granted by the American Constitution (Tawil, 2006). The Civil Rights movement's final goal was to end racial segregation and marginalisation perpetrated against blacks in America. Along with the recent horrors of the Second World War and the Great Depression of 1929 onwards that had previously plunged America into a period of despair and anxiety, the 1960s Civil Rights tensions created an inspirational space for Morrison and many other black writers and artists.

Commenting on Morrison's oeuvre, Tally (2007) observes that

Her novels might well be read in the chronological order of their respective time frames: the rural slave-holding South; the Great Migration to the North; post-World War I and the Harlem Renaissance; the Great Depression; World War II and pre-Civil Rights; the Civil Rights era and the Vietnam War; and the "Age of Greed" with its political, social, and personal backsliding (p.3).

The historical events that America experienced at different epochs have played a great role in Morrison's work. The racial marginalisation and the repetitive wars and conflicts that marred profoundly the past of the black people turned Morrison into a socio-cultural victim. It is within this context that her novels *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye* and *Love* are set respectively in World War One, World War Two and The Civil Rights Movement era to reflect on the human condition of the African American during those periods of national disaster and world regression.

Alongside Morrison's work, other African American writers have decried the white cruelty while celebrating Black nationalism. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) though published shortly before the period of Civil Rights Movement, approached the same issues of social inequalities that were the root of the permanent social instability in America. The ideology of Black nationalism continued to feed black literature: Richard Wright's *The Outsider* (1953) and *The Long Dream* (1958), James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) and many other works—including Morrison's critical essays—appeared exploring at first the horrors of racial discrimination and other issues that were threatening black existence.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

African American literature traces in general the historical experiences of black people in America from the time of their enslavement to the contemporary times. The body of this literature shows a continuous tradition which reconstructs the African American history. Toni Morrison's writing carries on this tradition using different approaches in her novels.

Although her writing basically discusses the ordinary issues African Americans face in everyday life, they are written into a complexity of allegorical and metaphorical narratives dominated by dark, gloomy and supernatural portrayals that transform the ordinary world into an irrational and grotesque environment. Her novels are typified by unusual representations of terrifying settings, violent characters and incidents that depict an unnatural universe. These uncanny representations pervade the narrative line of *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Love*. In these novels, Morrison's characters include humans and spirits (ghosts) who interact within horrifying settings with extraordinary powers. This can be seen, for instance, in *Beloved* where Sethe's murdered baby shows up in a grown-up version of a woman at her mother's house eighteen years after her death. The ghost is received in the family and lives with her mother Sethe and sister Denver. Pilate and Macon Jr. in *Song of Solomon* meet and converse with their father-ghost Macon Dead. The ghost instructs the children to avenge him. These supernatural interactions between the living and the dead coupled with other uncanny instances create a world of horror which is not common in the novels of other African American writers. This world initiates a reversal of the natural world as characters undertake alien and self-destructive actions in an attempt to decry the painful alienation they endure. Various incidents in the narratives and the intricate narrative structures within which these incidents appear unveil the opposite of what the reader expects. In addition, several scenes of underworld, suicide, incest and insanity are some of the dark and gloomy features that reinforce the despondency of the depicted horror world.

This study addresses the narrative complexities and the appalling instances through which horror unfolds that Morrison deploys in her fiction to discuss the dilemma of the African American existence. It thereby looks at the writer's representation of

disconnectedness and the disoriented attitude of characters which constitute the roots of the horror represented in her works.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study is based on the following objectives:

- i) To analyse the significance of horror in Toni Morrison's novels
- ii) To examine the use and purpose of the narrative strategy of disruption in her novels.
- iii) To explore the ways in which the narrative device of character disconnectedness unveils the alienation reflected in the selected texts
- iv) To investigate the role of time and space in the construction of a horror world

1.4 Research Questions

This research answers the following questions:

- i) What role does horror play in Toni Morrison's novels?
- ii) To what ends does the narrative structure in Morrison's horror novels employ disruption?
- iii) How do Morrison's characters reveal the feeling of disconnectedness in the struggle against the pain of racial marginalisation and the subsequent social inequities?
- iv) What is the import of temporal and spatial backdrops in the representation of a horror world in Morrison's fiction?

1.5 Research Premise

Horror, in Toni Morrison's fiction, provides an appropriate narrative style and an alternative perception of the experiences of the African American society.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research on Toni Morrison's fiction builds up the existing scholarship on the African American writers' achievements. The study props up not only the African American quest for a reestablishment of a dignified socio-cultural recognition but it also supports the struggle of all oppressed communities in need of liberation and self-redefinition. Most importantly, this study focuses on Morrison's horror novels which have been significantly selected in that they mirror both the past and the present human condition of black existence in America. In fact, the works expose meticulously the socio-cultural vices that disgrace America through history and suggest the attitude the African American should hold to resist racial and sexist alienation.

First, this study focuses on horror for two important reasons. The general assumption and popular belief about horror indicates that "horror aims primarily at scaring audience" whether in film, in visual arts or in literature (Wyatt et al., 2007, p.79). Initially, this study demonstrates that horror is not actually employed by writers and filmmakers to scare audience; it is rather used to educate and reform society. In *Beloved*, the return of Beloved's ghost to torment her mother instructs Sethe and the reader that, no matter the circumstance, a crime is always evil and should be avoided. This goes the same with Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*: his unfaithfulness, ingratitude and profanation of nature and society condemn him to total destruction: he goes mad and later dies pitilessly in a workhouse.

In addition, this study indicates that, despite its terrifying and devastating nature, horror is not absolutely destructive: the constraining and painful nature of horror empowers the weak and elevates him to a considerable social position thanks to an

inspirational power and knowledge acquired through the sore experiences. Indeed, the various horrifying instances that Morrison introduces in the texts under study indicate that most characters who go through acute tribulations end victoriously and experience rebirth either in the mid narrative or at the end; and they end up psychologically and spiritually transformed. In *Song of Solomon*, Ruth Forster wins over the perpetual cruelty of her husband Macon Jr. Besides, Milkman's arrogance and cupidity that epitomise his childhood and adolescence vanish thanks to the painful experiences he endures on his journey toward self-discovery. Through horror, he is transformed into a trustworthy individual and reaches maturity that leads him to discover the hidden roots of his ancestry. All these instances suggest to the reader that horror is not meant to scare the audience; it educates people and remodels society.

Second, this study focuses on Toni Morrison for two essential reasons: Morrison is not the only African American writer to discuss the African American predicament. Other black writers like Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and others have also discoursed extensively on the same concern of racial marginalisation in America. But Morrison's attachment to history that she combines with the present is a unique aspect that distinguishes her from other African American writers. This aspect of historicity boosts up Morrison's fiction and makes her narratives more colourful and timeless. In addition, while other African American writers centre their writings on the racial marginalisation as the only cause responsible for the destruction of black existence, Morrison goes further and adds to this racial dimension a radical protest against the phallogentric structure that is destroying the African American woman. This double tone against race and gender in her fiction contributes to a better understanding of the African American predicament in its multidimensional facets. In this way, Morrison reveals that the root of African American disintegration is both

from within and from without. The auto-destruction of the black community enables the white man to reinforce his power.

Though this study does not rest on a feminist stance, it constitutes an important and noteworthy source for researchers in women and gender in African American studies. In effect, the analysis of character disconnectedness that Morrison brings in the narratives discusses in detail the misfortune that characters—males and females—experience on their journey to selfhood. For instance, the double marginalisation that Eva and Nel endure in *Sula*, first from the white man of Medallion and then from their husbands, highlights the pain of the African American woman. The cruel treatment of Ruth Foster by her husband Macon Jr. in *Song of Solomon*, Pecola's double molestation by her own father in *The Bluest Eye* and Sethe's assault by schoolteacher—a situation that is exacerbated by the social ostracisation that she faces in *Beloved*—indicate also the hardships of the black woman's struggle in a community that seeks to deny her. Although this study limits itself to the analysis of the aspects of horror that epitomises characters' lives, it exposes the embarrassment that alienates the black woman's existence. It is from this perspective that the study is useful for researchers in women and gender in African American studies.

This thesis has chosen to work on Morrison's novels with one important reason. Though the writer is generally known as novelist in the literary arena, she has also produced some scholarly plays, short stories and prose. Baldick (2001) highlights the power of the novel over other genres in fiction

It disregards the constraints that govern other literary forms, and acknowledges no obligatory structure, style, or subject-matter. Thriving on this openness and flexibility, the novel has become the most important literary genre of the modern age, superseding the *EPIC, the * ROMANCE, and other narrative forms...The novel

differs from the prose romance in that a greater degree of *REALISM is expected of it, and that it tends to describe a recognizable secular social world, often in a sceptical and prosaic manner inappropriate to the marvels of romance (sic, p.173).

With regard to horror imagination and construction to paint the African American struggle, it is in novels where Morrison more intricately elaborates horror incidents to reveal the alienation of blacks in America both in the past and in the present time. It is from this perspective that the study chose to focus on the writer's novelistic achievements to approach efficiently the nature, the meaning and the role that horror plays in her works.

Finally, this approach to horror gives a contribution to the understanding of writers of other societies who have employed similar approach in dealing with the past as a determinant of the present through the uncanny.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This research primarily focuses on Toni Morrison's five novels with horror aspects. These novels are: *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Love*. The study explores the works only in line with horror aspect; it examines the instances of horror and the related narrative strategies of disruption and disconnectedness used in these works in order to understand the significance of horror that Morrison deploys in her fiction to discuss the dilemma of the African American existence.

1.8 Review of Related Literature

There have been various conceptions among critics about Toni Morrison's writing. Her works have been interpreted within multiple perspectives. First, this writer has been explored as an African American writer whose main goal is rooted in the advancement of the African American humanity. For instance, Hummer (2007), Lister

(2009), Gillespie (2008), Howard (1989) and Christian (1999) discuss Morrison's devotion to the African American cause. The critics note that the deplorable social conditions that Blacks have experienced in America constitute the essential preoccupations Morrison discusses in her works. Second, critics have interpreted Morrison as a Marxist and social class analyst. Peterson (2009), Burrows (2004) and Razmi and Jamali (2002) observe that Morrison's art criticises the tradition of social class distinctions in America and the subsequent exploitations that continue to keep the African American in servitude. Other critics consider Morrison's work a historical fiction due to the writer's interest in the past with regard to slavery and racism (Lagash, 1998; Harris, 2009; Raynaud, 2007; Magill, 2003). Feminist critics, on the other side, have examined Morrison's work as a feminist writer who speaks for the African American woman under the oppressive hand of the phallogentric structure that seeks to affirm its power over the pain of the deprived African American woman. Suranyi (2007), Kang (2009) and Grabs (2002) discuss this state of gendered anxieties. There are other critics who have interpreted Morrison as a Gothic writer. Jeffrey Weinstock (2004:79), for instance, notes that some of Morrison's novels "have a Gothic tone because of a profusion of supernaturalism that creates a world distinct of the ordinary one". Another category of scholars have praised Morrison's style thanks to her intricate resourcefulness in language use. Williams and Arson (2008) and the appreciation by the Nobel Foundation (1993) of the writer's style emphasise the greatness of language use and message that feature her works. This section examines in detail what these critics advance about Morrison's writing in order to establish the unexplored space that constitutes the research grounds.

While the existing criticism on Morrison's art indicates that scholars have explored the writer's work under thematic perspective rooted in a socio-cultural awakening,

this study considers a different approach: it basically explores the writer's work within artistic perspective set by horror deployed in her fiction. In fact, the core of this research analyses how the writer deploys horror in her narratives to represent the African American dilemma. Morrison's narratives are built upon an intricate structure that reveals multiple facets of alienation. There are important narrative strategies and incidents she brings in and which transform her fiction into an unfamiliar literature. These strategies contribute to the creation of a world of horror which mirrors the human condition of the African American people.

As mentioned earlier, the existing scholarship on Morrison has significantly discussed thematically the various issues raised in her fiction. Yet, Morrison's novels reveal also a presence of a narrative and artistic dimension that boosts the thematic structure of her fiction. Although this narrative and artistic dimension has not been given attention in the existing criticism, it plays an important role in the writer's imagination of incidents and themes that depict the struggle of the African American community. A lot of the themes discussed by the writer feed on these incidents artistically woven to succeed the portrayal of the American social malaise. Based on a horror perspective, this review identifies initially the artistic instances that have not been approached in the existing critique in order to establish the research grounds of this study.

Hummer (2007) analyses the brutality that features Morrison's fiction, the cruelty that characterises the interactions between black characters on one side, and between black and white characters on the other. Hummer notes that the American world depicted in her writing expresses a sombre pessimism that weakens hopes for a peaceful and desegregated America for both the white and the black. He observes how

Beloved, though ghost, comes back to haunt and destabilise violently Sethe's house causing trouble in the family. In her claim, Beloved wants her mother to return back her humanity. With magical spell, she makes the whole house quake and life in the compound is paralysed. People, dogs, mice—animate and inanimate, all possessed (p.73).

According to Hummer, violence dominates Morrison's *Beloved*. The mistreatment to which black slaves are subjected creates a dreadful atmosphere that causes people to despair. The critic analyses the way Morrison proceeds by showing how discrimination makes society crumble; she deplores the chaotic state that is bringing down the society. Hummer's observations give an illuminating landscape to Morrison's exploration of the revulsion in which communication between the living and the dead is apparent. Although Hummer's essay does not focus on the horrific aspects the novel exhibits, he notes that the work juxtaposes two antagonistic worlds—the real and the unreal—the good and the evil—to represent the conflicting forces of human nature. This study diverts from Hummer's analysis in that it analyses how horror enacts Morrison's unreal world with regard to the supernatural conception and the role it fulfils in the texts. In fact, the study examines how the writer builds the supernatural realm and the way it works to convey a message.

Lister (2009), in her assessment of *Song of Solomon*, examines Robert Smith's trial to flight and Milkman's birth in Mercy Hospital. The critic analyses how Morrison juxtaposes Robert Smith flying to death and Ruth Dead giving birth to a black baby in the white 'Mercy Hospital' forbidden for blacks. She further contends that something important in the life of the American black is showing up. Lister later mentions Morrison's concern about the African American maturity to safeguard the future renaissance as the writer is outraged by the internal divisions that are growing among Blacks themselves. The critic observes that Macon Jr.'s greed to amass wealth at the

cost of his wife and children is a premonition which indicates that the recovery of the denied identity from the white oppressor still requires some sacrifice. From a horror perspective, my analysis is different from Lister's observations in that this study examines Morrison's construction of 'the Double' in a horror setting to reflect on the duality of human nature.

Gillespie (2008) explores the possibility of a 'Beloved Community' that Morrison establishes in her novel *Love* (2003). The critic observes how Bill Cooney deplors the behavior of his father Daniel Robert Cooney who betrays his fellow blacks by working for the white police as a secret informant. Gillespie notes how Bill refuses to forgive his father but tries to work consciously in order to fix the wrongs of Daniel Cooney. According to Gillespie, the 'Beloved community' Morrison longs for is a recognition of an African American individuality. In this imagined "Beloved community," a society should "be established where the inevitable conflicts of human interaction could be resolved by negotiation and compromise rather than through retaliation and revenge" (p.111). Gillespie remarks that Morrison's imagination of Bill Cooney's wisdom—a young boy who refuses to antagonise with his corrupt father—typifies the possibility of building a new and peaceful America through dialogue and reconciliation. Although this study differs from Gillespie's observation in that it is concerned with an interpretation of horror in Morrison's fiction, it takes advantage of her character analysis in order to understand and further explore the foundation and meaning of the strange and uncanny reactions of characters and the havoc that epitomises the gloomy and horrific settings of the selected texts.

Commenting on *Song of Solomon*, Howard (1989) questions the cruelty with which Macon Jr. treats his family. He states that the scary suicide Robert Smith commits

deliberately before people is a sign of an excessive depression and anxiety that characterise the devastated psyche of the African American. The association of Robert Smith with Macon Jr. in unrelated situations implies the confusion into which the black Americans are penned. “The trial of flight that Smith initiates and costs him life,” argues Howard, “hints Morrison’s reader about the impossibility of the oppressed to remain passive” (p.88). The cupidity manifested by Macon Jr. attests the lack of cohesion between blacks. Howard examines how Robert Smith commits suicide publicly: he goes atop Mercy Hospital—a name the critic finds ironic and absurd as the hospital never admits black patients; and nobody warns Smith to renounce his dangerous misadventure. He is sure humans have no physical capability to fly. Yet, despite this awareness, he jumps off the building; unable to fly as he wishes, he plummets to death. This horrific incident which is performed enthusiastically indicates the despondency of black existence in America.

Howard’s essay discourses on the hardships of African Americans; it outlines the challenges brought by racism which is the source of the deplorable human condition. Morrison’s novels are dominated by a powerful use of images and symbols. The overall development of her fiction is characterised by a profusion of iconographic presence that makes her fiction different from other African American narratives. We read for instance in *The Bluest Eye* how Claudia and Frieda MacTeer conjure marigold seeds and bury them underground for some months in a way to determine the future of the unborn baby Pecola is having in her womb. On the basis of the magic processes these sisters perform, they are able to determine what shall be the outcome of Pecola’s life and the baby she is carrying. With regard to the imagery and symbolism that pervade the selected texts, this study explores the function

iconography serves in the conception and construction of a horror world in her writing.

Barbara Christian in her essay “The Contemporary Fables of Toni Morrison” (1999) reads Morrison’s *Sula* from a sociological perspective. She finds Morrison a fabulist whose inspiration draws much on nature. Christian mentions that Morrison’s novels hinge on a powerful characterisation in which “the signs, symbols, omens, sent by nature [such] wind and fire, robins as a plague in the spring, marigolds that won’t sprout, are as much characterizations in her novels as the human beings who people them” (p.25). In her exploration of the community’s beliefs, the critic realises that “Morrison weaves a fable about the relationship between conformity and experiment, survival and creativity” (p.26) in which the normal order of things is reversed as a way to announce chaos in the society. Assessing *Sula* as a mythological fable, the critic finally infers that nature feeds Morrison’s art

The mythological tone of this tale is heightened further by Morrison’s pervasive use of nature images. Throughout *Sula*, images of fire, water, wind and earth are closely linked to the eternal presence of death and the Bottom’s concept of time. As a result, the novel projects an integral world view, for the qualities of creativity and destructiveness are continually transforming the images of nature (p.28).

Christian’s sociological point of view on *Sula* leads her to discover that Morrison’s fiction borrows in part from mythology to generate fables whose important raw materials are provided by nature. For the critic, nature becomes a source of re-appropriation and cultural affirmation. This thesis neither initiates a sociological interpretation nor does it engage an eco-critical examination of the role nature plays in Morrison’s fiction. With regard to nature, this study examines how nature is reflected in horror settings and the role it fulfills in the construction and transmission of message to establish communication.

Peterson (2009) examines the violent and angry impulse with which Beloved storms her mother when she returns back in 124 Bluestone. The critic argues that the infanticide Sethe committed by killing her two-year baby Beloved makes her feel guilty; and the guilt she bears revives Beloved in her demands. Peterson observes the traumatic atmosphere slaves endured and suggests that “what Sethe had done was right because it came from true love”—a desire for a mother to see her children ‘protected’ against the cruelty of slave existence.

Questioning, however, “the nexus of violence and kinship” between a mother and a daughter to understand Beloved’s ‘spitefulness’ toward her mother, Peterson argues that her violent actions are founded though they clash with her mother’s “relieving infanticide” (p.156). The critic explains that the claim Beloved introduces is evidence of the unfair treatment black Americans went through for ages that must be atoned by the whites.

While Peterson’s essay focuses on Beloved’s claim and the relationship she entertains with her mother, my study discusses Beloved’s supernatural identity as a revenant ghost, her eerie actions and the horrific atmosphere she creates both as a ghost in spirit and as a human in form. In the same light, this analysis of supernatural characterization is further extended to other characters in the selected texts to examine how characters and locales are represented to meet the aesthetic requirements of horror.

In *Whiteness and Trauma: The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison* (2004), Victoria Burrows reads Morrison’s *Sula* and suggests that “the capricious destruction of the rural community”—a land that was cunningly gifted to a former brave slave by his master, indicates the destruction

of the black soul. According to Burrows, this destruction entails the “black community’s alienation and exclusion from any participation in the history that had, and continues to have, so much impact on the lives of African-Americans” (p.114). The critic finds paradoxical and ironical to have named the land ‘Bottom’ whereas it is located on the upper hill above the white community. For Burrows, the choice of the name ‘Bottom’ that is attributed to the black community insinuates the white man’s wicked nature that drives him to underrate the African American whom Morrison hopes should regain full humanity as an American. She believes this might be a malicious and subtle trick that the white man applies to defame the black and his cultural legacy. The inhumanity and capitalist impulsion of slavery left an indelible scar that can never be erased from the collective conscience of blacks. Burrow’s reading seeks first to re-establish the lost black identity and then demystify the white man’s stereotypes that underestimate the black man’s individuality. Morrison’s dichotomous representations of the black community of the Bottom and the white community of Medallion depict the contrast of stereotypes of inferiority and superiority that characterise the living conditions in these two hostile neighborhoods. This thesis therefore analyses how Morrison’s use of horror engages with the process of magnification and miniaturization in the representation of ordinary incidents into unnatural instances.

There have been debates among critics to consider whether horror fiction is magical realism or whether the two are independent bodies sharing only some common aspects. Mehri Razmi and Leyli Jamali in their article “Magic (al) Realism as Postcolonial Device in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” (2012) consider *Beloved* a magical realist fiction. In this article, Razmi and Jamali observe

A large number of writers, who are currently in conditions of oppression in the United States, have taken up magical realism as a means to write against the dominant American culture. Among them is Toni Morrison, an African-American writer, whose fifth novel, *Beloved*, has been described as one of the most prominent texts to emerge out of the African-American literary tradition. She is concerned with the concept of blacks as marginalized and black literature as the non-canonical literature and tries to redefine white/black hierarchy of mainstream discourse, a discourse which always has undermined black's existence in the construction of American literature and culture (p.112).

The discourse on horror and Magical realism initiates in some cases confusion in the distinction and interpretation of some literary texts. With the gloomy and horrifying instances that Morrison's *Beloved* presents its readers, there should be less discussion on its horror identity (Erickson, 2009). Yet, the mingling of ghosts and human characters in her novels informs the reader about an existence of a magical realist creation. Razmi and Jamali reaffirm that

The source of this transgressive and subversive aspect of magical realist narrative in *Beloved* lies in the fact that, once the reader finds that the category of the real is not definite then all assumptions of truth become vague. Because the setting of *Beloved* is realistic, when the category of the real is questioned within the fiction, the world outside the fiction is made less certain as well (p.113).

Ramzi and Jamali observe how "in *Beloved* there is no distinction between the spirit world and the material world, between the living and the dead, between past, present and future;" and finally give credit to the narrative as a magical realist story in that "the family accepts the presence of a child ghost who later takes human form, as the grown-up version of the child who was killed by Sethe eighteen years earlier". (p.113)

This study revolves around the deployment of horror features in Morrison's fiction to analyse how horror constructs meaning and portrays reality. Although it does not take a magical realist perspective, Razmi and Jamali's observations give an important contribution to establish a distinction between Morrison's imagination of horror and Magical realism.

Pauline Lagash, in her critical work *Turning Back to our Roots* (1998), assesses Morrison's *Beloved* on grounds of cultural contacts between black slaves and white slave-owners. She notes that "the work opens and closes with unfortunate events in which the reader identifies loss and dislocation of individual's self" (p.67). The victimisation of the black and the usurpation of his freedom abate his humanity. Lagash observes the passionate commitment blacks incarnate in their relations as slaves and notes that black folk possess an identity that makes them feel a community with a common cultural legacy to defend and a common enemy to resist. They know they are forbidden to gather; yet they secretly meet in a way to remind one another the humanity they are denied, that they have to reclaim. Lagash has taken a historical point of view to analyse the socio-cultural relations that existed between the subjugated black culture and the oppressive white dominant culture of the enslaved America. While this essay explores the inter-cultural relations existing between slaves and masters, my study documents how Morrison's fiction captures the notion of time and space as setting elements in the representation of the fragmented self.

Morrison's fiction is built upon a structure that reveals her feelings showing simultaneously what America is and what it should be. Either in *Beloved* or in *Song of Solomon*, the writer's sentiment about the "lost idealised New World" (Rodriguez, 2007, p.237) is evident. Rody (1995) holds that "*Beloved* is manifestly the filling of a historical gap" (p.93) and suggests that one consider the novel story as "structures of historiographic desire," that is, an "attempt to span a vast gap of time, loss, and ignorance to achieve an intimate bond, a bridge of restitution or healing, between the authorial present and the ancestral past" (p.97). History plays an important role in Morrison's fiction. Rody's interpretation of history acknowledges its role in the life of an individual. According to Rody, history cements the fragmented memories of

people's self and connects them to their ancestral heritage. Close to Ashley (1997) who holds that "all gothic fiction is tragedy," it can also be argued that all horror fiction is tragic insofar as it *ipso facto* deals with the horrid and the dread and is the umbrella under which the Gothic falls. This study reflects on Rody's exploration of how history and its related memories merge to create and give meaning to the horrifying incidents manifested by the characters' cruelty and rigidity.

Harris (2009) examines Morrison as a traditionally mythological artist who intertwines myth and reality to discuss the African American predicament. Harris's essay "Song of Solomon" (pp. 5-6) argues that Milkman Dead can be looked at as "the classical Icarus" who attempted to experiment his power through flight. Milkman Dead, the protagonist of *Song of Solomon*, is anxious to find that humans face the inability to fly as it has been discovered from Robert Smith's attempt. He finds the world around him filthy and decides to undertake a venturesome journey that will take him far to find out the roots of his ancestry though paradoxically he is rather searching for gold. Harris maintains that Milkman's discoveries of his roots are an expression of Morrison's reiteration of an undeniable African American self rooted in a deep history that should neither be denied nor challenged. In his profound examination of the writer's mythical undertaking, the critic concludes that the myth links the American society to a boundless arena that would take in all Americans on equal grounds irrespective of colour. Myths as well as traditional folktales are part of Morrison's artistic sources from which her literary inspiration sprouts. This research departs from Harris's analysis in that it explores the artistic tools of communication Morrison's fiction applies to bring about horror. In other words, this stage helps understand the writer's choice, meaning and use of those tools and the significance they hold within a horror setting.

Raynaud (2007) examines the power of memory in *Beloved*. She argues that the novel chronicles the fragmented memories of the bitter past of slavery that blacks endured for centuries in America. These recollections link the contemporary black community to reconstruct black recognition—the identity they are claiming for. Raynaud further argues in the essay that the novel “probes [slavery] effects on the individual psyche of blacks and white people but also the repressed memory of slavery in the make-up of the American nation” (p.43). Raynaud’s observations of the effects of the past and the memories of slavery in the lives of the blacks in America are important to this study though her reflections detach from my considerations. While the critic examines the effects of memories in *Beloved* as a new phase of ‘healing the scarred minds’ of the historically marginalised blacks, in this study, the effects of memories of the past are examined as an important component upon which Morrison’s horror construction rests. The study consequently analyses how these memories usually expressed in form of terrifying dreams and hallucinations disrupt the plots’ narrative structure to create an atypical narrative that reverses the natural order of the narration process.

David E. Magill, in his essay “Approaches to Morrison’s Work: Historical” (2003), notes that part of Morrison’s work locates its roots into a history that revives memories. The critic argues that “Morrison’s career is marked by an increasing engagement with history on a thematic and structural level” (p.21). Focusing on *Sula*, Magill observes how the story, built in the past, evolves on successive years which turn the novel into a chronologically historical narrative. On *Song of Solomon*, he contends that the narrative is about “a search of family history”. History resonates significantly in Morrison’s work. Her essay “Rediscovering Black History” attests the interest the writer attaches to the past in that she redefines herself as a ‘continuous

thread of a historical black ancestry' that needs to assert its power and presence with a dignified self. Magill observes this historicity

Morrison's more recent works, however, are historical fictions, more overt explorations of history and its forms. Morrison relates disturbing moments in our past, refusing to look away from the horrors and tragedies that form African American history. Yet she also engages history on a structural level, using folklore, myth, oral narratives, and other nontraditional sources as a means for weaving an alternative history that captures what traditional histories leave out. Morrison thus redefines historical methodology as well as content in her...work (p.21).

Magill's point of view on the global work of Morrison centres on the historical nature that her fiction embodies and the importance history plays in the redefinition of black humanity. That history rises as an important tool in Morrison's novels is an evident fact. This study moves away from Magill's historical perspective of Morrison's work. On the contrary, my analysis is directed at how history and supernaturalism coalesce to achieve an effect which transforms the ordinary realistic settings into terrifying incidences to create a horrifying atmosphere which mirrors the world that surrounds the characters.

In her essay "*The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*: Black Female Experience from Childhood to Womanhood" (2007), Ágnes Surányi analyses how Morrison exposes the fragility of the African American woman from the threatening abuses of which Pecola is permanently victim. The critic remarks that the problem of marginalisation black people endure turns to duplicate when the already black 'marginalised' patriarchy seeks to ostracise women with whom they share the white man's rejection. From her feminist stance, Surányi argues that Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is "a tragic story of child abuse, with race, gender and class mixed in", a work "concerned with racial self-loathing, the loss of identity and shame...of prejudices rooted in racialism and sexism" (p.11). Based on the analysis of character disconnectedness, the study looks

at how Morrison's horror imagination elucidates the woman's status through the conflicting representations of the vindictive cruel *femme fatale* and the victim innocent woman.

In the essay "To Love and Be Loved: Considering Black Masculinity and the Misandric Impulse in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2009), Nancy Kang reads *Beloved* from a gender perspective; the critic notes that Morrison's black male characters appear victims of a misandric hatred and suffer a mental amnesia that transforms them into depressed individuals. Kang initiates a comparative analysis of the female and male characters; she discovers that female characters are a bit morally settled than the male although the female sexual exploitation worsens woman's existence. In her gender reading, the critic observes that the black American world Morrison portrays is a misandric society in which the black male is both hated by the black woman and the whole white community. Kang posits that "the predominant manifestation of this racialised misandry is...in a national context, constant recourse to the black man's sexuality as his number one (dis)qualifier" (p.27). "To recognise misandry," the critic continues, "is to sense that masculinity—black masculinity in particular—is threatened, under stress, or remains a dynamic force that has been constrained to the extent that it has nowhere to go" (p.29). Kang observes how the sexual oral assault to which Paul D and his inmates are subjected dehumanises its victims and turns them paranoid; they feel anxious any time they see the prison guards come to harass them. Kang notes also the humiliation Paul D goes through when *Beloved* dismisses him as an intruder who should not sleep with her mother. Believing he would be a welcome guest, Paul D becomes a social misfit and feels heartbroken. This misandric treatment forces him to question the value of his manhood in the community of his fellow blacks. The critic explores also how Sethe felt dejected when she learned that her

husband, Halle, was watching and did not come in to rescue her when she was brutally and sexually assaulted by schoolteacher and his nephews. Kang states that from that moment, Sethe “hated” her husband to death. Besides, her unconditional and total “firing by her employer of sixteen years for only one late morning to job makes her suspect the humaneness of male arena—black and white” that she believes is source of all the evils she is enduring (p.33).

This misandric interpretation that Kang undertakes in the analysis of the contours of love in *Beloved* highlights the place of romance in horror fiction. The current study neither tackles the question of love from the feminist point of view nor from the masculine gender perspective. This study examines the meaning of love and how it is understood and experienced within the realm of the grotesque. This enables us to understand how romance, considered as a literary tool, shapes horror as a genre and contributes to the construction and transfer of a message through tragic incidents as a way to represent the image of the society.

In his analysis of *Beloved*'s epitaph, Weinstock (2004) argues that “*Beloved*'s epitaph marks a site of memory, a powerful contact zone between the living and the dead” (p.74). Weinstock holds that reading an epitaph drives the reader to behold the identity of the deceased—to immortalise a permanent link between the living and the dead. His observation suggests the power of communication that continues to exist between the living the dead by keeping memories permanent. This study advances Weinstock's idea of communication between the living and the dead by examining how Morrison's treatment of the supernaturalism creates and gives meaning to the existence of fear of the unknown—a factor that underlies the core and finality of horror in art and literature.

Alongside Morrison's work, horror fiction in American literature has also been explored by other writers who discussed the American issues in various perspectives. The most significant threshold came with Edgar Alan Poe who made important innovations in American literature by shaping horror and assigning it a notable value in the American short-stories (Marlot and Brown: 2004). Critics who assess Poe's literary achievements consider him a pioneer of the Southern Gothic and horror. Commenting on his famous short-story "The Fall of the House of Usher", Henry Marlot and Tom Brown, in *The American Terror at the Door*, share the idea that "Poe is one of the most exceptional Gothic and horror writers who uses the 'I' character to relate stories" (p.167). He uses horror as a subject in his work often making the work difficult to dissociate whether it would be a subjective narration of his personal experiences or an objective portrayal that would paint the communal issues. Examining the structure of the same story "The Fall of the House of Usher", these critics assert that the "technique of twinning is another common occurrence in the writings of Poe" (p.172), a technique that puts together two unrelated situations to obtain a frightening construction that depicts a horror world. In addition, an examination of Poe's evocation of the decaying towers in his "City in the Sea" leads these critics to hold that Poe's horror style "depends largely on the traditional Gothic setting of the European tradition" (p.179).

From this observation, it can be argued that Morrison's horror writing diverts from Poe's style in that her narratives apply generally the third person narration while Poe's follow the first person. In addition, Morrison borrows materials for settings from the American environment while Poe often resources from the traditional European settings of the old castles, mansions or abbeys although both writers share the common aspect of the supernatural and the grotesque in their works. In this study,

the technique of twinning enables us to analyse how Morrison's novels apply this tool in the construction of plots and the importance this technique plays in the process of narrative disruption.

Earlier, we saw how sociologists, anthropologists and historians examine Morrison's fiction and consider her an advocate for the American subaltern. In addition to these important interpretations, other critics have explored her writing from an aesthetic perspective. Referring on the form and content of her works, Williams and Arson (2008) observe that "Morrison is worth a poet writer than a novelist" (p.79). This observation is due to the writer's ingenuity about how she employs language and the way incidents are imagined and woven to produce horror sceneries. When she was receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature (1993), the Nobel Foundation committee shared the same view when they proclaimed Morrison a writer "who, in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality" (Nobel Foundation, December, 1993). This study touches the stylistic aspects employed in her works to build horror.

Joseph Hornway, in the essay *Horror and Humanity in Horror Narratives* (2002), discusses the literary achievements of Nathaniel Hawthorne. He claims that Hawthorne's style is dominated by "a commentary on the degrees of guilt and innocence possessed by all humans" (p. 82). According to the critic, Hawthorne "uses the light and the dark to represent good and evil" that typify human personality. Unlike Morrison and Poe, he sets his works in the Puritan times—a way to invite Americans to reflect upon moral rebirth and transformation in an America that he considers partly good as a nation and partly evil as a land of racial considerations. Unlike William Faulkner's American medieval settings, Hawthorne's Puritan settings

occur in the wilderness; he is consequently referred to as a Wilderness horror writer. Hornway closes his essay stating that Hawthorne's horror style "is a testimony of the guilt of repressed crime or sin that indicates the American loss of Americanness" (sic, p.103). The critic explicates this guilt and the related "America's original sin" in reference with the expropriation of lands and the associated dehumanisation that were brutally inflicted on the original inhabitants.

Although Morrison's horror narratives do not take place in absolute wilderness, Hornway's reflections on Hawthorne's settings located in wilderness stimulate an analysis into Morrison's conception of settings which are varied vis-à-vis the circumstances. The largest part of *Beloved*, for instance, takes place in Sweet Home Plantations—a setting that resembles wilderness. In addition, *Song of Solomon* unfolds many of the protagonist's adventures occurring outside home. Morrison presents him taking long trips to rob his aunt Pilate and later undertaking a mysterious journey during which he unexpectedly discovers the roots of his ancestry. These experiences happen outside home in places that can also be simulated to wilderness. The same case of wilderness settings resonates in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: after the protagonist Pecola is raped for the second time by her father, Cholly Breedlove, she becomes pregnant. She is unfortunately dismissed from home by the same father; she is condemned to a street life that she will end up miserably. With regard to Hornway's observations, this thesis examines Morrison's choice of such settings and the meaning they carry to bring about a horror action.

This reading of diverse conceptions on Morrison's work has brought in a significant contribution to the beginning phase of this study. Although the existing scholarship shows that a lot has been done on Morrison's work, the scope of horror deployed in

the writer's work has not yet been approached so far. Hence, while acknowledging the importance of the contributions made by previous scholars, this study is different from the existing critical repertoire on the writer's work. Based on a horror perspective, this study discusses Morrison's choice of horror and the way she deploys it to approach the social challenges that African American community faces. The horrific and macabre incidents, the anxieties, the disasters and the cruelty that epitomise her writing are central elements to the present study. These elements enable the study to investigate the significance of horror in her work on the basis of the appalling instances, the narrative disruption of plots' constructions and the process of disconnectedness that characterise the novels' incidents and style.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This research is essentially guided by the psychoanalytic concepts of 'Abjection' and 'The Uncanny' propounded by Kristeva (1982) and Freud (1919) respectively. These concepts complement each other on the different analytical aspects of the study in order to reach a comprehensive analysis. In some stages of the study, the analysis is reinforced by Propp's narratological functions (1968) to examine the textual narrative processes that generate a strange world. An overview of these concepts is therefore necessary in order to understand how they relate to the texts the study is concerned with.

The concept of abjection developed by Julia Kristeva in the treatise *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) is a psychoanalytic thought that was brought forward by the critic in 1980 in her analyses on the workings of a human body in contact with a dismal object or a delicate embarrassing situation. Literally, the term 'abjection' means "the state of being cast off" (p.27). In the general use, the concept

suggests degradation—a feeling of profound moral debasement. It is understood as that “which inherently disturbs conventional identity”, something that corrupts, disrupts and ruins an individual’s moral integrity (p.32). In simple terms, the abject refers to the spontaneous reaction of the human body like vomit, sweating, shivering, weeping or urination due to a rupture in meaning as the victim experiences a loss in the distinction of subject and object or self and other (p.38).

Kristeva argues that within the boundaries of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ that she respectively designates as “‘part of oneself’ and ‘something that exists independently of oneself’—there reside pieces that were once categorized as a part of oneself or one’s identity that has since been rejected—the abject” (p.48). It is this rejected part of one’s self that Kristeva describes as the ‘abject’. Kristeva gives a general example of abjection with the horror that an individual feels by the time they encounter a body of a person they were familiar with such as a parent, a sibling, a friend or any other close relative; one’s self disintegrates at the sight of the corpse identified now as an object of a person who was once a human being with all the qualities to fit within the boundaries of the subject. The realm of this subject has left space to an object represented by the body at the present. The self or the moral integrity of the individual who has lost tragically his relative disintegrates: this state of mental disintegration is what Kristeva calls *abjection*; it may manifest through crying, weeping or to some degree reacting violently by committing tragic acts like murder, suicide, sexual harassments, insanity...Hence, the abject is, in Kristeva’s words, the “me that is not me” as the victim is no longer able to manage the totality of his self (p. 5). The critic indicates that when abjection has reached the highest state, it results in '*jouissance*' which is a sensation akin to a psychological joyousness caused by an uncontrolled deepest mental depression.

Scholars have examined Kristeva's concept of Abjection with diverse observations. Creed (2009) notes that "the place of the abject is where meaning collapses," the place where one is not (p.128). It is not easy to understand how a mother takes a saw and deliberately cuts her own baby that she indeed loves since the baby itself is a reflection of the mother's own self. Yet, Sethe does so as her ego experiences an abject state that transforms her being into a strange mother. Creed maintains that the abject threatens life; that "it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self"(p.111). Creed's observation asserts the grim nature of the abject in which a person experiences the collapse of their self.

Pentony (1996) argues that abjection represents a "revolt against that which gave us our own existence or state of being" (p.8). According to Pentony, when we confront the abject, we simultaneously fear and identify with it. It propels the victim in a state of desolation where they experience a sense of boredom and helplessness. The self is threatened by something that is not part of us. Kristeva explains this situation by stating that "the abject has only one quality of the object and that is being opposed to I" (p.1).

This concept of abjection is important to investigate the causes of the characters' moral disgust in order to examine appropriately the strange and violent reactions that result in. Horror fiction often depicts a gloomy world in which characters are shown preying on one another, traversing tragic situations and surmounting obstacles generally in a way that is hard to understand within rational thinking. While exploring Hogle's assumptions (2002) on Kristeva's abjection, Sigurðsson (2009) claims that

the term abjection serves “to describe the process in which horror is created by presenting one with what one refuses to accept about oneself” (p.9). It is this rejection that black characters refuse to endure—a rejection which creates tensions that culminate into horror.

Above, we have indicated that the concept of Abjection works jointly with the concept of The Uncanny and Propp’s narratological functions in the process of analysis of the texts. Basically, ‘The Uncanny’ is a psychoanalytic concept propounded by Sigmund Freud in his essay ‘The Uncanny’ (1919) on the effects of the return of the repressed. In the essay, Freud holds that things which are most terrifying to an individual are perceived in such a way because they used to be known and familiar to him at a certain time before they were held back into one’s unconscious (p.195). By the time they resurface, they become strange producing horror and decay. Freud maintains that “the subject of the ‘uncanny’...belongs to all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (p.195). It is the dread which is the foundation of horror.

At the origin, ‘The Uncanny’ that Freud describes as ‘Unheimlich’ in German, denotes a situation that is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, gloomy, dismal or ghastly. In this case, ‘the uncanny’ which is understood as ‘unfamiliar’ appears opposed to the ‘familiar’ that Freud terms ‘heimlich’ in German to denote an existence of a situation that generates psychosocial intimacy where an individual secures moral and psychological comfort (p.196). From the concept of ‘Unheimlich’, Freud signifies the presence of estrangement in a home; there is a threatening feeling of the unknown that is located in the realm of the intimate and which creates permanent disturbance. Freud, however, counterbalances the presence of the threats of Unheimlich with the

relieving effects generated by the Heimlich, "homely" which refers to something already known and relaxing on one side and hidden on the other. In Freud's view, an individual's home is a sort of a secret place to accommodate one's conscious and subconscious actions; and the manifestation of the uncanny proves the eruption of what might be kept secret but shows up as the body is under threat and cannot retain the shock.

Freud, however, was not the first to introduce the concept of the uncanny; his article is in fact a reaction to Ernst Jentsch's account on the subject. Both Jentsch and Freud relate to E.T.A. Hoffman's short story "The Sandman" as an example of the uncanny, though they draw different conclusions. Jentsch, in fact, was the first to explore the realm of The Uncanny that he theorised in his essay *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906).

Unlike Freud who explores the uncanny as something once familiar which returns from the repressed to disturb social order, Jentsch defines the uncanny as being a product of an "intellectual uncertainty...the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one's way about it" (p.26). He contends that one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular character in the story is a human being or not. Jentsch never mentions in his conception the existence of the return of the repressed to trigger the uncanny. It is the state of uncertainty which prompts the fear for something we were not expecting but abruptly happens. In the analysis, Freud's concept of The Uncanny enables to explore the characters' conscious and subconscious reactions they manifest within various circumstances.

Freud claims that the horror we experience is a result of the return of the repressed which irrupts into our conscious mind to disrupt social order—a return of something which was once familiar with us but now reappears in a strange manner. At this juncture, we can understand that the uncanny is a product of an individual's unconscious mind. According to Freud, the uncanny is an appropriate example of the manifestation of the return of the repressed which often appears in a shocking mood. Basically, it is this manifestation of the repressed horrors of slavery that drives Sethe to murder her baby. In *Song of Solomon*, Robert Smith commits suicide out of excessive humiliation due to racial marginalisation: he attempts to fly and plummets to death. In the same novel, Hagar goes mad and dies of a broken heart out of repressed pain of a betrayed love that comes to surface. While reading how the uncanny commands characters' actions in the texts under study, this concept makes possible the interpretation of how and for what purpose the shocking experiences are deployed in Morrison's fiction.

In Morrison's novels, horror manifests itself in various forms due to the variability of circumstances that generate it. As mentioned earlier, it is for this reason that the study combined essentially the psychoanalytic concepts of abjection and The Uncanny in order to achieve a comprehensive analysis. On one side, the concept of abjection enabled the study to analyse the horrifying instances that emanate from characters' moral disgust caused by the disturbance of social order. On the other side, 'The Uncanny' in this study complemented the Abjection in the examination of the terrifying incidents, dreams and characters' actions which relate to the workings of the human mind; this assisted to account for the strange behaviours resulting from the return of the repressed.

Significantly, The Uncanny and abjection converge on one important aspect with regard to horror: the discovery of an existence of the weird and the description of how this state alienates an individual's self. While *the uncanny* reveals the threat created by the return of the repressed as it invades one's mind, abjection uncovers the effects of psychological instability generated by moral disgust due to the breaking in meaning between the subject and object or between the self and the other. Hence, the uncanny and abjection built up an appropriate panopticon for the examination and understanding of horror which in fact typifies the texts of this study.

In this way, the concept of abjection was useful in the reading of the characters' behaviour and the horrifying incidents that pervade the texts of this study. It served as a key to penetrate into the roots of the foundations of horror, to identify its cause and essence in order to account for the different purposes for which the writer applies it. Particularly, the concept of Abjection assisted in the examination of horror instances that emanate from the general circumstances which cause disagreeable feelings or moral aversion. For instance, the meeting of a ghostly white bull by Freddie's mother which prompts her sudden death while giving birth or the animosity and unrestrained tussle that feature the 'Cosey women' in *Love* can adequately be understood through the lenses of abjection.

It goes the same with the uncanny instances that the texts under study unveiled. Shadrack's mental depression caused by the shocking memories of World War One has turned him abnormal; he has lost the sense of self and always urges people to kill themselves. He remains inquisitive and insistently questions why the community of the Bottom is too obsessed in living rather than dying. For Shadrack, in death there is solace. Sethe's murder of her daughter asserts equally an existence of a creepy state in

her being. Such instances in Morrison's fiction shall be sufficiently discussed and understood effectively with the help of the psychoanalytic concept of The Uncanny.

Beside the psychoanalytic concepts of The Uncanny and Abjection, this study was guided by Vladimir Propp's "functions of dramatis personae" elaborated in his narratological essay *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968, pp. 35-67). These narratological functions assisted in the examination of the instances of the narrative strategy of disruption that pervade the texts under study to understand the influence of characters' actions on the evolutional process of the narratives. The main action of the thirty-one functions elaborated by Propp centres essentially on the "hero/heroine" in his/her struggle to overcome the impediments set down against his journey to selfhood. In this study, the action of these narratological functions was extended to the actions of the protagonists and main characters to analyse the narratological processes of disruption and disconnectedness applied by Morrison to disrupt the evolutional process of the narratives.

1.10 Research Methodology

This research was based on a textual study of Toni Morrison's novels with a major focus on horror aspect. As a result, the study was anchored in a qualitative research that was conducted using the appropriate qualitative methods and techniques. Hence, the methodology employed comprised sub-sets of data collection techniques, research tools and data analysis methods. Being a textual study, this research employed Kothari's Motivation Method (2004)—a type of technique used in qualitative studies to understand the reasons that 'motivate' individuals to behave in a strange way and take on unusual actions that usually bring them to self-destruction. Being part of the methods used in qualitative research, Kothari claims that *Motivation Research*

(Method) “aims at discovering the underlying motives and desires” that drive people to behave in particular ways whereby good as well as evil acts are performed, crimes and benevolence are observed in the life of a community at a specific time (p.3). This technique of Motivation method enabled us to identify the appropriate data in connection with the study’s issues rooted in unquantifiable variables of disruption, disconnectedness and disorientation, cultural disintegration, defragmentation and selfhood.

1.10.1 Data Collection

Initially, Kothari’s Motivation method enabled us to identify characters with unusual behaviour and the violent reactions they engage that take them to self-destruction in their wonted interactions with the environment. The collection of relevant data was therefore organised into six different sections. Each section gathered the appropriate information on the research item being selected throughout the five primary sources. The collection of data for the first section gathered data related to the representation of characters and the violent interactions that feature the painful experiences they face. This collection followed the characters’ brutality and the horrific tasks they undertake in the objective to gather appropriate information related to character disconnectedness.

The collection continued to observe, text after text, the elements of supernaturalism by identifying the horrifying instances that the writer introduces in the works. Horror does not limit on the supernatural to comment on the social issues that harden human existence. For this reason, the collection extended its field to all the characters’ tragic, strange and violent instances represented in the selected texts.

Collection further selected all the artistic tools the writer applies in the texts to create a strange world featured by unfamiliar circumstances in her novels. Images and symbols that relate to the weird constituted also another section to gather as they provide important information about the wickedness, the brutality and rudeness the writer deploys in the texts.

Another section of research item that the collection of data singled out throughout the five primary texts concerned settings. This section gathered data related to the setting elements—temporal and spatial—employed in the texts and which participate in the creation of horror. Data collected at this stage were important in the examination of the role that time and space play in Morrison's horror imagination to reveal the dilemma of African American existence. Instances of the return of the repressed and memory constituted another research item to gather throughout the selected texts.

The last section of research item targeted data related to the narrative strategies Morrison applies in her novels. Particularly, the collection considered, at this stage, the instances of the narrative disruption and character disconnectedness that the writer deploys in her fiction “to familiarize the strange and to mystify the familiar” as Morrison herself indicates (Lister, 2009, p.1).

1.10.2 Research tools

Besides the five primary sources, the materials that the study employed included: journal articles, critical works on Morrison's literary oeuvre and career, existing works on horror literature and some works on American and African American literature and history. To align with the most current and latest data useful for the study, tools also included online data from websites related to the African American studies and horror fiction.

1.10.3 Analysis Procedure

As already mentioned, the process of analysis of the collected data employed the psychoanalytic concepts of abjection and The Uncanny respectively developed by Kristeva and Freud together with the Functions of dramatis personae of Propp to reach a comprehensive analysis. Further, the analysis was effective by the use of the cumulative combination of Ian Dey (1993, pp.157-159) to draw final conclusions of the study. This phase consisted in the examination of the data obtained from every section with regard to the study's outlets to be filled in and the research objectives to be achieved.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter has given a panoramic landscape of the content of this dissertation. Initially, it has contributed to trace the main orientations that this study grasps. The preliminary substance on horror has shown the necessity of the present study to discuss Morrison's approach to the African American condition with regard to the oppressive white culture and the phallogocentric structure of the black community. In its development, the chapter has outlined the important points in which the work is grounded. Most importantly, it stated the problem and the objectives of the research which bear the nucleus of the study. In addition, on the basis of an elaborate review of the existing literature, it has been possible to identify the important gaps this thesis answers in its developing stages—gaps that explain the utility of this study. This introductory section has also established among other points the theoretical ground and the methodological design that guide the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HORROR IN TONI MORRISON'S FICTION

2.1 Introduction

In a fictional setting, horror is an operative language that enables communication in particular circumstances set by an environment. Individuals may communicate and receive information through the channel mapped out by horror. In the preface to *Beloved* (2004), Morrison stated that she “wanted the reader to be kidnapped, thrown ruthlessly into a horrifying and alien environment as the first step into a shared experience with the book’s population—just as the characters were awfully snatched in a horrible world from one place to another, from any place to any other, without preparation or defence” (*Beloved*, p. xviii). This statement sets out the substance that this chapter discusses in detail: it analyses the aspects of horror, its use and meaning that Morrison deploys in her works. The historical depersonalisation of slavery against the deprived black people in America, the ghastly atrocities brought by human self-destruction of the two World Wars and the Great Depression of 1929 onwards brought a sceptical attitude about the potential of the African American who had been longing for a socio-cultural location within the American social arena. In addition, the racial segregation and the phallogentric spirit that excluded women from the social structure created another pessimistic stance with regard to social advancement. Morrison’s art is embedded into these painful challenges: they depict a terrifying struggle that characters engage in a way to overcome alienation caused by these painful experiences.

Barthes (1966) has described the substance of the literature born from those tragic times as “an amalgamation of regret and remorse of the horrors that mankind had never known” (p.23). The works inspired by those events discourse on the unspeakable dehumanisation that had objectified human existence. The notable achievements of science and technology which, in contrast, contributed to the massive destruction, brought scepticism with regard to the relevance of science in the lives of people. Writings born in those periods depict the horrors and the psychological depression that mankind had never experienced. Morrison basically fictionalises the pain of the time in *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* in a style that creates awe and psychological disgust.

In *Sula*, Shadrack’s insanity and Plum’s psychological disorders that have made them strange in their own community emanate from the painful hardships they experienced while they were fighting in World War One. Morrison portrays these characters as dilapidated, unable to secure neither social integration nor family acceptance. As a result, both die tragically. While Shadrack is buried alive by the tunnel that collapses over him and his friends (p.69), Plum dies immolated by his mother Eva who pours oil and fire on his body to burn to death. These awful images prompt fear and terror in the mind of the reader. Although these characters do not directly die at the battlefield, the main roots of their physical and mental decadence originated from the horrors they experienced at war while fighting. There is a feeling of disgust and revulsion that predominates the narrative; this bleak atmosphere that creates darkness, distress and fear is an important feature that pervades the other texts this study examines.

This chapter discusses the various forms and manifestations in which horror appears in Morrison’s writing. It explores the contours of horror, its meaning, nature and

function in the selected works. It investigates the main orientations for which the writer adopts its use and the purpose that motivates her to deploy it in her writing. As the study centres on the discussion of the foundations of horror, the analysis is essentially guided by Freud's psychoanalytic posits compiled in 'The Uncanny' reinforced by Kristeva's considerations on Abjection in some stages (ibid.).

2.2 Horror: Meaning and Importance in Art and Society-Building

Most literary texts based on horror raise a series of questions that are very important. The particular point that these questions share in common is about the foundation of horror. This is the significant crux in the understanding of horror and its chief missions. Kristeva (1982) and Butler (2006) give important observations that define, explicate, and situate horror in its context of application either in art or literature. Kristeva contends that the prime of horror lies in the disgust. The diverse meanings that the concept connotes and the multiple usages that have been advanced by scholars differ from one another; but they converge on one aspect that fear, terror and suspense constitute the basic foundation on which horror is grounded. The multiple forms through which horror appears and is experienced by individuals are at the origin of the variability of the theoretical approaches to horror in fiction.

In the anthropological and sociological perspective of the Kristevian psychoanalysis, horror relates to what is socially hard to endure and which turns life practically difficult to stand. Simply put, the realm of horror contravenes the notion of the normal as it projects reality into the world of the abnormal and the unfamiliar. Contemporary approaches to horror indicate that a comprehensive and unique understanding of horror is not possible. The process of defining horror calls for an acceptance of an amalgamation of multiple considerations that diverge in some cases.

Mathias F. Clasen (2007) argues that “horror is defined affectively and not according to setting or content” (p.25). For Clasen, there is horror when an incident or a given circumstance is capable to rouse considerable emotion in the mind of the audience. The emotion the critic evokes at this point refers to the dread, the psychological tension and trepidation that an incident can raise. Yet, the stimulation and reception of the resulting emotion is a fact that varies from one individual to another and from one incident to another with the influence of the environment. While the setting and the nature of incident are essential elements for horror to occur (Punter, 1996, p.69), Clasen observes that these elements have a limited action to instigate horror. Yet, in horror and gothic fiction, setting has an important role in the creation and design of incidents that would raise dread. As a case in point, a concert occurring in a stadium would be more frightening if the same event were to occur in a cemetery. Clasen maintains that it “is that kind of fiction which is designed to scare and disturb its audience” that can be regarded as horror. A work of fiction can, however, produce eeriness for one person “while it leaves another rather unperturbed” (p.25). People have different perceptions of the world as they have different temperaments. The sinister nature of incidents and the depressing atmosphere generated by the environment ascribe an important feature to fiction to rouse dread.

The problematic of definition and characterisation of horror stems also on the blurring dissociation of horror as a genre and as a literary style that cuts across various genres. Critics have analysed this ambiguous state with different considerations. Jensen (2005) asserts that horror “can be found in other genres, especially fantasy,” and “if horror is a genre, then it deals with a protagonist dealing with overwhelming dark and evil forces” (p.99). Morrison’s *Beloved* can be considered a horror genre in line with Jensen’s description. The narrative chronicles the misadventures of a difficult journey

undertaken by the protagonist Sethe right from the beginning to the end. The plot evolves upon “dark and evil” incidents where humans and spirits meet to create chaos that results into physical and psychological devastations. From the beginning to the end, the novel is dominated by a portrayal of gloom which makes its content a typical horror genre. Jensen’s observation of horror’s biform identity is a common feature that is found in many artistic and literary works. The twofold identity raises complexity to achieve a common understanding of horror either in visual art or in fiction. Despite the versatility it covers, scholars of horror theory and criticism agree that horror fiction must carry a certain intensity of eeriness, terror and revulsion (Botting, 1996; Lovecraft, 1933). In addition, it must include an element of suspense that prompts the fear of the unknown—the supernatural aspect being a secondary attribute (Carroll, 2004).

While critics in literature discuss the place of horror in fiction, opinions vary. Spratford (2012) argues that the threats humans face can be overcome by help of writers who “succeed to stigmatize the evil by putting on the show damages through horror” (p.89). When other critics believe that horror adds little value to a literary discourse (Pender, 1996, p.144), there is a great debate on the status it holds within the boundaries of art and literature.

Horror in literature is as old as literature itself. This goes the same with horror in visual arts and film as well. The classical works of art and literature of Rome and Greece incarnate this identity. The sculpture that portrays the strangulation of Priest Laocoön and his two sons by two giant serpents in classical art (*Laocoön*, 1st Century B.C.) bears an uncanny scene that renders the observer stupefied. The three characters

who are crushed by the two serpents die in tragic conditions that leave the audience agitated and empathetic with the victims.

While examining the importance and finality of poesy in the edification of man, John Keats observes that “there is no art for art’s sake” (Stillinger, 1978, p. 42). The sculpture imparts an inquisitive force to the observer to look into the causes of Laocoön and his sons’ predicament. Readers also experience appalling fear while reading Homer’s epic tales *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. These classical works relate respectively the wicked destruction of Troy by the Greeks and the agony of King Oedipus and his daughter-sister Antigone. This indicates that the approach to horror to discuss social concerns is not recent in art and literature.

Beside written works of fiction, horror is an important tool used for entertainment. In folktales, horror weaves the thread to reinforce the action of the story. In these oral narratives, monsters, werewolves and vampires dominate the course of action. On the surface, they paint a chaotic landscape overrun by terror which, in reality, assures a lovely and amusing atmosphere to its audience generally dominated by individuals of young generations. This sort of horror in traditional setting is universal: it almost exists in all traditional societies (Ong, 2002, pp.111-115). It fosters the knowledge of cultural heritage by keeping societal values permanent through generations. The setting of these stories is generally located in family homes or within a restricted village where monsters irrupt and cause terrible devastations. They kill people or devour them alive before the inability of the family or the community members. In many cases, these monsters come at night where they snatch victims by surprise and with little threat to be defeated. Cannibalistic scenes pervade the stories.

Metaphorically, night portrays danger and any dark place is suspected to contain evil forces of destruction. The temporal settings happening at night provide a societal warning for human beings against the danger of lack of mutual communication.

Generally, narratives are interspersed by lyrical songs whose content seeks to counterbalance the gloomy atmosphere created by the monsters' presence. Such songs mitigate the existing tension in a way that they provide a soothing narration against the previous tragic incidents; the lyrics revitalise the audience who were feeling so petrified and gradually losing interest in the story due to the excess of gore and other macabre scenes being narrated. Most of these evil forces incarnate human existence either in past or in present: ghosts and vampires are a reincarnation of a human being in past while werewolves personify a human being in present, that is, in existence. The ghosts of Beloved and Macon Dead in *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* remind the reader of the physical existence as human beings for these characters in the past. In the present, the narratives represent them as ghosts; they show up into the communities to which they belonged while alive.

The eruption of ghosts, monsters, vampires and werewolves into the lives of humans portrays the dual nature of human beings. By essence, humans are born with good and evil nature. Such stories instruct the audience to overcome the evil seeds possessed by every human in order to nurture the seeds for the common good. It is within this context that the return of Beloved as a ghost instructs her mother-killer and the Cincinnati community that a crime is always wrong no matter the circumstances of time or environment. By the time Sethe meets the ghost of her daughter that she murdered many years ago, she feels guilty despite her conviction that she wanted to assure 'safety' to her children.

By nature, horror literature is part of popular culture (Prohászková, 2012). Popular culture links people to the socio-cultural realities of a community. It bestows an individual's self-recognition. The cultural entertainment embedded in horror gives value to the cultural identity of a community. In it, members of a community feel connected and indebted to the traditional heritage of ancestors. In this case, horror unites the living and the dead; and therefore perpetuates the cultural identity. The settings involved in traditional folktales provide significant information about the cultural values of a community. Set in locales similar with the environments where the audience live, stories are built in a style that facilitates reception of various cultural realities.

Ong (2002) observes that in the traditional art of an oral culture, horror is expressed through the artistic realisations that embody the life of the community members (p.97). Wood or stone sculpture can contribute also to the representation of horror. From these works, the observer often feels attached to the idealistic representations that the artistic creation paints. In *Beloved*, Denver becomes hypnotised when she comes across a figurine that depicts a slave boy in Edward Bodwin's house (p.268). The figurine depicting a slave boy unearths Denver's painful memories of slavery that destroyed her family. When she looks at the sculpture in the house of a respected abolitionist, she immediately feels heartbroken. She develops a negative perception of the Bodwins' charity and benevolence towards blacks: from a benevolent abolitionist, Denver discovers that Edward Bodwin is a hypocrite; and his hypocrisy mirrors the racist mindset of the North.

Horror literature neither creates nor invents new phenomena that never existed. It departs from the existing social realities and therefore constructs an image that

reflects the community's ways of life. Horror creates a language that is unique in itself. It constructs message through an intertwinement of scenes in which incidents grounded in terror, anxiety and distress constitute the body of the narrative. Carroll (2004) affirms that "horror, in its dimensions of genre and feature, is a serviceable concept through which we communicate and receive information" (p.13). He maintains that horror in its essence "is not an obscure notion" and therefore fits the place to represent the awkward occurrences within a realistic setting.

Morrison deploys this tool to represent the fragmentation of the American society. Horror serves the writer to reach the depth of the African American dilemma and represent appropriately its multifaceted dimensions. Although Morrison introduces scenes of supernaturalism that cannot be directly linked to the current challenges that African American community is experiencing, her supernatural construction does not reflect "an obscure notion" as Carroll states. Though abstract in the sense the supernatural works, the instances of supernaturalism do not detach from the writer's main goal of decrying marginalisation that destroys the American society. Within these incidents, issues of racism and phallocentrism resonate in the same way they are perceived in other horrifying contexts. The reader of *Beloved*, for instance, understands easily that *Beloved's* supernatural identity is not accidental or "obscure". The writer builds a metaphor of the cruelty of slavery that would force slaves to commit serious crimes such as suicide and various murders in a way to reconcile with the wounded ego. In this novel, the protagonist Sethe resolves to murder her children for the sake of 'protection'. Similarly, the supernatural identity of Macon Dead in *Song of Solomon* is also linked to the evils of racism and eccentricity. Macon Dead was killed by a white man who wanted to usurp his estate. As he was tragically killed in the same way of *Beloved*, his ghost returns to claim justice too. In brief, social

disintegration and family dismemberment caused by slavery, racial discrimination and the mortifying condition of the African American woman are the important factors in which Morrison's horror is rooted.

2.3 Horror and Abjection: Literary Perspectives

The relation between horror and abjection is very close yet difficult to fix with precision. The abject state that a person experiences prompts a feeling of disgust that disturbs one's moral integrity. This psychological state which "confines an individual at the outside of the social body imprisons him" from the independent judgment. It also places him away from "the thinkable and from there of the speakable" as Kristeva elucidates (1982, p.47). This mental state of 'the unthinkable' and 'the unspeakable' which is the source of the abject self is at the origin of the psychological unrest and the violent reactions of Morrison's characters. The writer illustrates this situation in *Sula* with the portrayal of the Bottom, a despised black community at the mercy of the aristocratic whites. She utilises an intricate language that puts forth contrasting outlooks between the two rival communities on the verge of collapse. The deployment of a depreciative language in which ironic and sarcastic concepts abound uncovers the concealed anxieties and agony that the black community of the Bottom carries in its interior self. This deprived black village has become an important center of interest for the whites who want to destroy it and erect a golf course instead (p.67). In the construction of the narrative, Morrison adopts an ironical language that seeks to demystify the white supremacy in a way to rehabilitate the distorted self of the black community. To achieve this, the writer attributes deliberately the derogatory denomination "The Bottom" to the black community to decry the corrupt mindset of sub-humanity that the wealthy whites of Medallion frame against the African Americans. Basically, the writer deploys a binary language construction to negate the

erroneous supremacy that the white community believes it incarnates; she attributes the disparaging name “Medallion” to this community as a contrast to the “Bottom” which denotes the black community. While “medallion” entails a sterling prize awarded to an individual in honor of one’s valuable achievements, Morrison deploys an ironic language to deride the corrupt beliefs that feature the white mindset. She deliberately ascribes the name “Medallion” to the white community not because she truly believes they merit this title but simply because she wants to ridicule the misconception of power that epitomises the white aristocracy. A medal is a symbol of esteem that bestows great homage to the holder. The prizewinner to whom a medal is awarded is recognised as an epitome endowed with virtues of mentor whose sense of leadership illuminates the way to advance humanity. Morrison provides a paradoxical view with the portrayal of Medallion in her novel. While the reader expects this wealthy community to uplift the deprived black Bottom, Medallion seeks rather to cast the Bottom into an abyss where blacks would die unacknowledged. By seizing the Bottom to convert it into a golf course, Medallion uproots and alienates the black community uncompromisingly in its financial potential to survive economically and in its socio-cultural existence as human beings. This excessive greed of Medallion is solely motivated by an irrational lust to satisfy its egotistical privileges rooted in an economic and racist hegemony. In the narrative, the reader learns that the geographical landscape of the Bottom is not even adequate to establish a terrain for golf as it is so hilly. Yet, the wealthy whites of Medallion leave their plane lands to conquer the mountainous lands and inaccessible valleys of the Bottom to build the golf course. The greed and jealousy of the rich community sarcastically known as “Medallion” causes the village to lose the social reputation it would merit in its vicinity.

Morrison's fiction usually transforms horror into a tool capable of rendering 'abject' certain individuals and circumstances that were not actually subject to abjection. The inconsiderate and selfish domination by Medallion over the Bottom creates an abject state in the mind of the victims of spoliation. In *Song of Solomon*, the excessive pride and the arrogant language that Macon Jr. holds against his wife Ruth and neighbours renders him so abject until the community rejects him; and he nearly becomes a social pariah. The distance he creates against himself and that the neighbourhood reinforces, transforms Macon into an abnormal and alien individual unable to locate his existence in the community as a human being and as a social creature in need of society's care and protection.

In Butler's view, it is in discourse where the possibility to subvert the meaning of a concept lies (ibid., p.26). This subversion of word or sentence meaning is one of the manifestations of the powers that horror holds both as a state and sensation of mind. We have seen how Morrison achieves this subversion with the use of the juxtaposition of the contrastive concepts *the Bottom* and *Medallion* in which she raises the Bottom (blacks) and lowers Medallion (whites) to restore justice. From this perspective, Butler suggests that the citation of an insult or a discourse of hatred in general facilitates to change the meaning. The reader experiences this observation from schoolteacher's mortifying commands against the slaves of Sweet Home (*Beloved*, p.147). In addition, the discourse generated by individuals socially and culturally alienated bears a sense of distress.

2.4 The 'Othering' Horror and the Identity of Minority

We have already discussed the relation between abjection and horror in reference to individuals experiencing marginalisation due to a status of minority. Based on the

way Kristeva's conception of abjection works, all the minor social groups under marginalisation develop an abject state resulting from the exclusion by the major group which socially considers itself as normal, standard and complete (Devirieux, 2012, p. 22). In *Sula*, Morrison portrays the black community of the Bottom repudiating Sula as they condemn the girl for her unrestrained promiscuous miscegenation—an act for which the community feels betrayed in its societal norms. Basically, sexual licentiousness in the Bottom is not considered a crime blamed by the society: Nel's grandmother, Rochelle, is a notorious slut in the community. The whole neighbourhood is aware of her licentiousness. But unlike Sula, her sexual freedoms are limited to black partners with whom they share the social plight. This indicates that Sula is not the only one in the village to practise illegal sex; yet, that she indulges in sex with white partners exhumes the anger and frustrations that her community bears against Medallion. Hence, her miscegenation is considered a betrayal against the community to which she belongs. Ultimately, Sula, regarded as 'Other' by the community, becomes both a threat and a victim with regard to the community's standards: she is consequently ostracised.

To exist socially, the 'Other' needs an appropriate recognition denied by the dominant counterculture. In *Beloved*, the Sweet Home slaves have been reduced to commodities: Paul F and Paul D are sold while Paul A is bludgeoned to death and Sixo burnt alive. Overwhelmed by the disgraceful treatment that has turned his mind abject, Paul D questions the value of his existence as a human being. He attempts to murder his new master Brandywine as he wishes to secure the denied humanity he has been longing for ages (p.107).

Examining the process of action of Kristeva's abjection, Pentony (1996) contends that the abject indicates a "revolt against that which gave us our own existence or state of being" (p.8). In his existence as 'another', Paul D seeks to break the cords of his abject state and thereby defy the oppressive hand so as to get back his "own existence". The iron bit that schoolteacher unemotionally attaches to Paul D's mouth through piercing emasculates him, first as a human being and second as a man. This emasculation deepens his alienated state of 'otherness' and hardens his abject body. The murder he intends to commit is not an act that he performs out of natural cruelty; he rather reacts so violently out of self-defence and personal survival to soothe his abject mind. Thus, the 'Other' and his body in which lies his pettiness, with regard to the white man, is an important category of the abject that disturbs his existence.

Different bodies and identities are still considered abject: being black on one side and being woman on the other are the important 'othered' abject categories in Morrison's fiction. Milkman's mother, Ruth, in *Song of Solomon*, is an important example of the 'Othering' horror that Morrison puts forth to decry the degrading phallogocentric structure that depersonalises the African American woman. Ruth has become trivia in the eyes of her husband Macon Jr. who has severed his relations with her for years. Accused by her husband of the wrongs committed by her father Dr. Foster, Ruth has become numb after her husband denied her company. She has become an object of criticism in the community due to her husband's public derision against her person. The hunger she suffers for a husband who hates her, yet whom she loves immeasurably breaks her identity as a mother and wife in a household. She is reduced to a puppet before her husband and becomes a prisoner of the house she is supposed to lead.

In short, in a situation of the abject 'Other', not only the body of the 'Other' becomes the center of shame and opprobrium but also the actions that they initiate are stricken by a subjective disavowal of the dominant force.

2.5 Classifying Horror in Morrison's Fiction

2.5.1 Facts and classification

Writers use horror in writing for many purposes. Either used for entertainment or education, horror draws on realism and fantasy to unveil the duality of human existence. This twofold depiction of life initiates new visions that serve writers and artists to reflect on the possibilities by which society should be healed. However, the art and techniques to observe and represent the natural phenomena have been different from one writer to another due to the defining social context and personal experiences of a writer. It is within this context that Wood (1979) explains horror and grotesque as versatile genres that reveal life effects with a multi-dimensional consideration.

Through horror, Morrison opens a vista for readers to observe and ponder on the various issues that are destroying the American society. The cruel treatment resulting from a socio-cultural denial feeds the writer's imagination. The disintegration of the American society provides the basic ingredients of the horror that she applies in her fiction to reflect on the loss and profanation of human values that should unite America. Morrison feels disturbed by an endless debasing human condition that hardens black existence. The rigidity observed in the use of horror in her novels depicts the adversity of black existence: characters are shown cutting deliberately parts of their own bodies out of frustrations. While Eva intentionally gets her leg amputated by a train, Sula deliberately takes a knife and cuts off the tip of her finger to intimidate the white boys who would like to harass her and her friends (p.51; p.67).

In some instances, the writer imagines incidents where she intertwines absurd situations which, however, happen in the real world. Tally (2007) discovers the writer's style too complex

These days, however, it is more than inappropriate to define Morrison as "marginal," not because she has moved to the center of the canon, but because she has managed to move the center; or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that because of her multi-faceted and untiring work, she has helped change a restricted, predominantly white, and male centered literary world into a multicultural mosaic (p.1).

On the basis of horror, Morrison succeeds to demystify the white supremacy and the masculine gender-based mindset that have undercut America for ages. The double agony of racial exclusion and woman's social debasement ignite the writer who seeks to subvert these challenges in order to launch a veritable reconstruction of a new America devoid of any prejudice whatsoever. Morrison seeks to 'move the center' which has been misplaced in order to position it in the right place where it would direct the community and illuminate the path for an integrative socio-cultural and economic advancement.

Fiction writers generally use horror to reveal the effects of human alienation. The representation of this condition is achieved through various forms. Basically, the writers' processes rest on a symbolism based on images borrowed from the ordinary world and fantasy. Frantz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for instance, are examples of horror fiction that present the reader an unreal world which can never exist within the boundaries of rationality. Kafka's portrayal of the physical transition of Gregor Samsa into a vermin appears irrational and practically impossible in the ordinary world. It goes the same with Mary Shelley's protagonist Victor Frankenstein's scientific achievements: Frankenstein, a university scholar, succeeds to create a monster out of old body parts; he brings the monster to

life. Although the phenomenon of ghosts is understood within supernatural scope, ghosts are commonplace in the real world where they irrupt to bring chaos and trepidation. However, that a human being succeeds to create a monster on the basis of scientific knowledge is beyond rational capacity and cannot be possible in the natural world. Like ghosts, monsters are spiritual beings. Their state of existence escapes humans' capability to exercise power over them on the basis of scientific knowledge. But Shelley, like Kafka, imagines a fantastic world which enables Frankenstein to create a monster out of the remains of a human body.

Morrison's approach to horror does not adhere too much to the irrational and fantastic idealisation though she brings in some incidents that evoke supernaturalism in her fiction. Admittedly, the return of Beloved after eighteen years she is dead is a supernatural fact. Although the return of the dead appears strange in our daily lives, ghosts' revenance is a common phenomenon that occurs in the natural world. In the first time, the arrival of Beloved in the family turns the family members suspicious; but later they start developing a sense of acquaintanceship with her. *Song of Solomon* portrays Pilate, a lady who was born without a navel. In the real world of humans, such a birth cannot happen; every unborn is biologically linked to the mother right from conception till birth. The navel is a symbol of existence, of humanity and humanhood, and beyond all of naturalness. Thus, Pilate's biological identity as a human being is questionable; her nature connects Morrison's audience to the extraterrestrial world of fantasy.

There are various tragic instances that her writing traces. The horrific sexual assaults to which slaves are subject, their live burnings, the dismembering of fugitives and other instances in *Beloved* are horrifying incidents that happen in our daily lives. In

addition, the ghost passages that we read in *Song of Solomon* and the magical conjurations in *The Bluest Eye* have also real connection in the ordinary world. For instance, the meeting of Pilate and Macon Jr. with their father-ghost Macon Dead is a common fact in the manifestation of ghosts into our daily lives. In addition, the appearance of a ghost in form of a white bull that appears while Freddie's mother is giving birth to the boy is a common fact in the day-to-day world of ghosts. In *The Bluest Eye*, the process of conjuration of marigold seeds by Claudia and Frieda MacTeer to determine the future of Pecola's unborn baby depicts the usual practice of superstition and witchcraft observed in our natural world.

An overall observation shows that the instances of horror in her writings can be summed up into two types: the *universal horror* which borrows raw materials from the real world and the *unconventional horror* which breaks the realm of the natural world to locate its scope into the irrational world. In these two types of horror imagination that Morrison deploys in her fiction, there are subcategories that indicate the nature of horror of the incident being portrayed and the subsequent message it imparts.

Prohászková (2012) distinguishes nine subcategories of horror which can be grouped into Todorov's three main categories: the uncanny, the marvelous horror and the fantastic horror (pp.132-133). Morrison's horror conception meets partly the critic's categorisation although it overlaps within itself at some degree; it leaves a hiatus for an appropriate account of some incidents which do not fit in either category.

The first subcategory Prohászková puts forth is the 'rural horror'. An examination to make here is that 'rural' as a qualifier does not imply an opposition to 'urban' or 'modern' conception of horror. It rather suggests a certain link to the traditional

heritage of ancestry in terms of culture and tradition. Prohászková mentions that this kind of horror “includes a local legend, myth or superstition” (ibid., p.133). In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison weaves scenes of horror that trace in part the story of old Solomon who escapes slavery by flying back to Africa (pp. 305-308). At surface, the flight of Solomon has some correlation with the mythical escape of Daedalus and his son Icarus who flew away from the labyrinth of which they had become prisoners. In connection to this myth, Morrison portrays Solomon flying back to Africa with his youngest son Jake (later called Macon Dead) who unfortunately detaches from his father in the air and falls down as he has lost grip. This detachment of Jake from his father mirrors the mythological detachment of Icarus from his father Daedalus. Ignoring the advice of his father, little Icarus flies further and his wings melt as he approaches the sun; he afterwards falls into the sea and drowns (*Microsoft® Student*, 2009, ‘Daedalus’). There are important features that put close one another Morrison’s fictional character Jake and the mythological Icarus: both are the youngest sons by father. In addition, both lose opportunities to escape the dangers that are threatening their existence. Morrison creates a metaphor of Jake that puts into play Icarus’s misadventure. In the same way young Icarus loses his father’s track and later falls down to die, little Jake loses grip from his father Solomon; and he desperately falls down to return and grow despondently into the horrors of slavery as he misses the chance to escape. Both characters share the same fate: they are doomed to loss. King Minos and his mythical monster Minauror that was destined to devour Daedalus and his son Icarus (‘Daedalus’, Ibid.) metaphorically represent the white man and the institution of slavery that undermine the human condition of black existence. As Solomon is an innocent victim of an oppressive socio-cultural system that he seeks to break, Daedalus equally is an innocent victim of King Minos’s tyrannical regime that

he challenges through flight. Morrison draws on ancient Greek mythology to create and shape the character of Solomon.

Meanwhile, the name *Solomon* is itself suggestive. In general, this name denotes an incarnation of wisdom to manage problematic issues that human beings experience. Morrison urges the black community to develop a sense of awareness to overcome the challenges they endure; she is shocked to observe that some of the African Americans are indifferent to the sufferings of their counterparts. The writer exemplifies and condemns this indifference through the character of Macon Jr. who despises his fellow blacks, starting by alienating his own family. In *Love*, the writer also raises this concern of lack of understanding between blacks through the wickedness of Daniel Cosey who betrays his fellow blacks to the white police. The suggestive flight that alludes to victory over subjugation becomes illusive for Morrison so long as blacks are divided against themselves. Biblical Solomon, as a king, experienced a lot of political challenges from within and outside that threatened his kingdom; but he ended victorious (*IKings: 3-11*). The writer raises a sceptical concern about the ascension of the African American community. As a pious sage and a triumphant political icon, Solomon's horror provides courage and relief to the afflicted. By extension, Morrison gives a call to the African American community to identify with the plight they are facing in order to undertake an action to overcome the enemy.

Again in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison imagines characters whose names pertain to Greek mythology. Though some incidents engage such mythological characters like Circe who do not actually exist in the cultural reality of America, one gets an idea of proximity and rapprochement that Morrison introduces through a distant mythological undertaking. While reading *Song of Solomon* in line with mythological perspective,

the reader learns that Solomon was not American: he was African. His wife Ryna was not American either: she was Indian by ancestry. Different characters from different societies and beyond all from different generations and cultural backgrounds are put together experiencing same problems and jointly sharing same pain. The introduction of the character Circe who receives Milkman in Virginia and directs him significantly about the roots of his family gives the reader an idea of closeness and intimacy that transforms distant individuals into a family. Even the ending of the novel is very telling with regard to rapprochement: Milkman invites Guitar who has just shot Pilate to death for reconciliation. The final paragraph of the narrative attests

Milkman stopped waving and narrowed his eyes. He could just make out Guitar's head and shoulders in the dark. "You want my life?"... "You need it? Here." Without wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees—he leaped. 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 knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it (p.341).

In Greek mythology, Circe was daughter of Helios and Perse who were respectively god of sun and sea nymph (Microsoft Student Encyclopaedia, *Circe*, 2009). With her mystical powers, Circe could transform humans into beasts but remaining with human reason. Under this trope, Morrison suggests that the destruction caused by slavery and all depersonalising times that succeeded in the history of African Americans could not disown them the identity and awareness of being Africans. Blacks were turned into commodities as the mythical Circe could transform human beings into animals; yet, they remained conscious of the agony they were experiencing. The struggle that Paul D, Sethe, Sixo and other slaves engage against schoolteacher is backed by a mutual consciousness.

The second subcategory of horror that Prohászková puts forth and which resonates in Morrison's fiction is the erotic horror. 'Eroticism,' in this type of horror, connects the audience to "the sensual or sexual imagery with horror overtones" (p.133). In general, erotic and sensual feelings and actions do not normally project on the screen an idea of suffering. We expect a state of bliss that will crown the story. In the erotic horror, however, love transforms into hatred and generally the story evolves with instances of devastations in which gory scenes, vampires and awful sexual assaults pervade the plot. Though Morrison's horror does not mainly focus on love affairs, there are some intricate stages that portray horrors related to sexual harassment, incest, and outrageous sexual intercourse.

Beloved portrays a lot of incidents that project sexual imagery. Even though this novel appears historical by content, some of the incidents portrayed are in reality linked to the present. The sexual imagery that portrays Sethe's mother and her inmate-friend Nan kidnapped together and sexually abused in the Middle Passage ship attests in part the monstrous life conditions a slave woman experienced during slavery. The narrator recounts the horrible calvary. Ella "told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew" (p.62). The two women 'were taken up' by white slave traders, were gang-raped repetitively for a long period. Psychologically traumatised, the distressed women could not accept the babies born from these dehumanising sexual abuses. A lot of women would abandon newborns in forests. Ella recounts to Sethe the bitterness her mother endured, "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. You, she gave the name of the black man" (p.63).

Morrison portrays how Ella herself was sexually abused by a father and a son on their farm. Again the narrator describes the incestuous crime with awe, “Something like that had happened to Ella except it was two men—a father and son—and Ella remembered every bit of it. For more than a year, they kept her locked in a room for themselves” (p.119). Most appallingly, the novel describes the prisoners of Alfred Prison, Georgia with sorrow and agony. Morrison portrays forty-six male prisoners subjected to an awfully oral sex by the white prison guards. These guards have established a regular schedule to meet and abuse the prisoners with oral sex at dawn just before a new day appears.

Putting aside the issues of slavery and racism that pervade her work, Morrison opens a new window to understand the present American society. Disheartened by the sexual licentiousness of the degenerative American youth, the writer advances a harsh criticism against the dangers of the rise of homosexuality in the 1980s America. She is angered by the rising immorality that she considers a threat to the American destiny. Particularly, the uncanny instances of homosexuality of which Paul D and his inmates are victims, generate terror that serves as a warning against the destruction of America. Morrison questions the future of the young generations that she sees depraved in all sides and being on the verge of collapse. In this way, she interrogates the role of social values, asking whether America should stand free of social values or not. Morrison is relentlessly disturbed by the wickedness of human nature. While dawn announces the coming of a new day—an expectation of new hopes—the writer presents her readers the opposite: it is at ‘dawn’ that prisoners are abused in the Alfred Prison. Why does Morrison choose to present her audience a paradoxical view of the normal way of things? Morrison has little confidence in the political leadership that she accuses of laxity about the rapid growing of immorality that she condemns as

it transgresses the social welfare of America. For the writer, the American potential is uncertain. The dawn that would project light and hope for happiness is eclipsed by the leading structure which does not care about the gradual destruction of social values. It is stunting the budding new America obtained at the price of great sacrifices of the 1950s and '60s.

Again on the issue of horror and sexuality, Morrison discusses other terrifying facets that obliterate the image of America. For the writer, it is ominous and suicidal for a society to disregard its cultural norms. *The Bluest Eye* traces the danger of neglect of cultural values and shows the consequences of social degeneration that result from such cases of dissipation. Morrison condemns the unrestrained sexual laxity that leads society to destruction. Decrying the evils of social degeneration in America, the writer portrays pubescent Pecola who has been molested twice by her father, Cholly Breedlove. What is more painful, Pecola has been sexually molested at the minor age of eleven. Once pregnant, she is ruthlessly dismissed by her father—though accountable for his daughter's plight. When time comes, Pecola gives birth to a stillborn baby as the prophecy of Claudia and Frieda MacTeer has revealed.

In a psychoanalytic context, the uncanny that Freud qualifies "Unheimlich" relates to a situation that arouses an *unfamiliar environment* featured by gloom, discomfort, awe and total desolation. Rape and child molestation are common phenomena in Morrison's fiction and especially in *Lorain* and in *the Bottom*. Yet, that such a double crime is perpetrated by a father over his daughter—and more upsetting a child of eleven years—creates an uncanny atmosphere that condemns Cholly and discredits as a parent. The curse he instigates strikes him and unfortunately attains the victim in her innocent childhood. The home that Freud (1919) describes as an "intimate and secret

place” is physically broken and culturally profaned. Pecola’s rape, in its biform nature of paedophilia and incest, institutes a climate of *estrangement* that breaks the pleasure and comfort provided by a home.

Morrison underlies the interconnection between nature and destiny of an individual. When Mother Nature which provides humans shelter and protection is profaned by the same humans it nurtures, it resentfully reacts and punishes the ingratitude. Besides the death of the baby that actually dies without having lived, Cholly Breedlove, the *bête noire* responsible for the demise of his own daughter, is repudiated by the same nature he desecrated: he goes mad, sets fire to the family house and finally dies a deplorable death that nobody pities in the whole community of Lorain. There is a paradox in the choice of the name ‘Breedlove’: the love that the writer hopes it should be ‘bred’, weeded, built, strengthened and safeguarded is manifestly destroyed by those who would guarantee its fortification. Not only does Morrison criticise the immoral lust that is destroying America, but she also traces the fragility of the African American woman under the oppressive male domination. Pecola is deliberately destroyed by her own father.

Erotic horror enables the writer to decry social immorality that is shaking the foundations of American society. While using this tool to decry cultural degeneration, the writer applies the same instrument to suggest maternal love that links a mother to a child. Among the events *Beloved* discusses, the funeral ceremony of Sethe’s ‘sawed’ baby is narrated with grief. At burial, when Sethe requests the gravedigger to inscribe the name ‘Beloved’ on the tombstone of her departed ‘beloved’ baby, the digger refuses. Sethe feels heartbroken to be denied a request that would appease her mind

by linking her love to the deceased baby. The demand will be accepted when Sethe accepts to offer the gravedigger a ten-minute sex.

In his analysis, critic Weinstock (2009) observes that an epitaph can create a liminal space where the living and the dead can meet thereby breaking the boundaries that split the two opposite worlds

Reading something as an epitaph forces one to consider the strange materiality of language, the way in which the sign can persist in the absence of both its producer and addressee. The epitaph marks a site of memory, a powerful zone of contact between the living and the dead. It performs the complicated function of calling to mind the departed as departed, that is, of foregrounding the present absence of the beloved. To read the epitaph is to remember its referent, to conjure the dead, while at the same time to be struck by the ephemerality of living (p.74).

The gravedigger proposes the grieving mother to accept an exchange of a ten-minute sex if she wants to secure her request. Unwillingly and having no other choice to make, Sethe accepts the proposition. She offers the digger sex and, in response, she obtains the epitaph 'Beloved' on the tombstone of her departed baby. The narrator describes the scene with consternation. Sethe, "her knees wide open as any grave," prostitutes her body to obtain the inscription of the name 'Beloved' on the tombstone, just "ten minutes for seven letters" (*Beloved*, p.5). The juxtaposition of distant images like sex and grave creates ambiguity in the mind of the reader. One contemplates a representation of psychological devastations that lead an individual to question the meaning of love. It is extremely horrific and cumbersome, almost unimaginable that sex can be used as a price to buy an epitaph, that is, a grave by extension. While the gravedigger wants to satisfy his lustful desires, Sethe offers her body to get peace of mind in order to perpetuate her love and reconcile with her departed baby. Because of the immense love she possesses for her children, she accepts to hypothecate her body.

The biological body becomes a trifle that can easily be sacrificed for the sake of love and honour of her children.

Again, Morrison borrows faraway concepts to represent the futility of life under a terrifying portrayal. Weinstock (*ibid.*) maintains that “one of the most dramatic movements of Morrison’s text is its insistence that love relationships must exist outside of the economy of exchange and possession” (p.75). Next to the portrayal of the immeasurable love the mother has toward her baby, the contrast between sex and grave underlies also the widening gap that still divides the society. Morrison examines the social contours of America and discovers that the success of an individual’s destiny lies in their own responsibility. She believes that the mutation of society toward regeneration is a duty that would be felt by each individual before commonality comes in. This feeling of reckoning on one’s self is exemplified in Sethe’s counting on her own sorrow: when she is denied the epitaph ‘Beloved’ on the gravestone of her departed ‘beloved’ daughter, she makes no appeal to call for a support from the community that is assisting her in the funeral.

Kristeva claims that when a person’s being is under the weight of the abject, “the imaginary realm disintegrates; this presence of abjection re-emerges in a terrible threat where our identity, state, system, being and conception of order disrupts under the effect of the powerful” (p.78). Sethe’s ego has disintegrated; her identity of mother has disrupted due to a new and alien conception of human existence. She embraces the mysterious world in a way to conciliate her body and the self that have dislocated due to the threat of the abject. She only keeps her sorrow within and seeks solely how to secure her need. She refuses to associate her plight with those she believes may have little understanding. Her success is a result from her sole and

personal endeavour. Morrison indicates that the racial threat blacks are enduring is, at first, a preoccupation for the African American before it becomes a national concern. She is sure good-hearted individuals exist among whites. Yet, she refuses to rely on their altruism so long as she knows that human nature is naturally unpredictable. To avoid any sort of disappointment that would occur, she advocates self-reliance.

Finally, the last subcategory of Morrison's horror in reference with Prohászková's categorisation is the occult horror. In this horror, the emphasis of incidents "focuses on exorcism dominated by cults, mysticism, curses and a wide scale of so called occult sciences" (p.133). Occultism generally plunges the audience into the world of witchcraft and superstition where everything is dictated by the law of the magic. Human reasoning and logic give place to inexplicable situations.

When Sethe's house is violently haunted by Beloved's ghost which has returned back in the family, Sethe invites Paul D to 'exorcise' the spirit—to send the haint away from home. Morrison does not clearly indicate whether Paul D is a sorcerer with magical powers to operate supernatural deeds. But in his occult proceedings, we learn that Paul D succeeds to remove the ghost from the house with the help of the community. The exorcism has been long and too demanding; but with the help of Cincinnati community, Beloved is finally kicked out and Sethe starts to recover. Alone she had failed to drag away the ghost. After the long stay in Sethe's home, the spirit had become not only a threat to Sethe but also a danger to the entire black community of Cincinnati. It is when the neighbourhood starts feeling concerned that they engage a communal action which ends up successfully driving out the ghost—suggesting the importance of unity among humans.

Occult horror is rare in Morrison's horror fiction. The writer deploys it rarely in the incidents that deal with the realm of the supernatural; but it does not enter the depth of the supernatural conception in her works. Being part of supernaturalism, occult horror in Morrison's fiction approaches issues in a very superficial way but contributes to reinforce the supernatural climate of the texts.

2.5.2 The language of disgust: the universal horror and the unconventional horror

2.5.2.1 The universal horror

We have already discussed the different subcategories of horror under which Morrison negotiates an appropriate socio-cultural and political welfare for the African American. An exploration of Morrison's revulsion fiction indicates that her narratives rest on two types of horror: the *universal horror* and the *unconventional horror*. This section discusses the nature and function of the universal horror which gives rise to most instances of disgust found in the texts under study.

The universal horror is the type of horror that dominates Morrison's horror fiction. In this category, suggested events and situations of the imagined incidents must have natural connection in the rationally real world. Incidents used in this fiction are taken from the everyday occurrences. In this category of universal horror, there is neither fantasy nor idealised events that do not find origin or natural reference in the actual environment. In this conception, Morrison makes use of the incidents that manifestly originate from human social interactions, cultural tradition and social norms.

Basically, Morrison utilises horror to approach the issues of racial marginalisation and womanhood. In addition, this style enables the writer to imagine characters and

thereby construct appropriate plots that would respond to the expectations of the audience with regard to the social concerns of the community. While using the universal horror, the abject incidents and uncanny stages that feature the bleak life conditions of the African American in general and the woman in particular are outlined. From *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *Love* (2003), universal horror appears as a thread that defines the author's narratives as a unique literary tradition. Themes and motifs reflected in these texts are built and shaped almost in a similar style. Significantly, from the central social concerns of racism and defilement of womanhood, the writer applies this tool to achieve some important goals such as: the education of her readers about the cultural values of the African American past; the mutual respect between people; equality of individuals regardless of colour, gender or class; self-recognition and the revalorisation of human dignity; and most importantly the value of the past and the present in the redefinition of the essence of humanity.

By means of universal horror, Morrison opens windows to her readers to discover the hidden facets of the African American predicament. *Beloved* which is a slave narrative with most elaborate horror incidents is so revealing. From the start, the novel opens with significant information which announces an impending danger that will be identified through the evolution of the narrative, "124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a baby's venom" (p.3). The concepts 'spiteful' and 'venom' in this passage are suggestive. They carry in them an image of gloom which informs the reader, at the very start of the narrative, about the misfortune to happen soon. In fact, 'spiteful' suggests the idea of something malicious, malevolent, painful and more significantly horrid. It announces an apocalyptic situation to happen later. Besides, 'venom' implies poison which, in the long run, entails death; often once a person consumes poison, they are exposed to fatality.

Most interestingly, the novel's dedication is more poignant and juts out on the horizon the gloom that the reader expects to meet later. Morrison's novel's dedication "Sixty million and more" (p.1) presents the reader a devastated world: the *sixty million* of black souls that were suppressed, abused and innocently martyred for the only reason that they had been created and born black and forcibly found on a land that was not theirs—where they were considered curse-bringing.

From the universal horror, Morrison borrows ordinary images which depict the socio-cultural and economic realities of the American world. Various sinister images are used to represent the fragility of black existence in America. In *Beloved*, beside the confusing ghostly identity of Beloved which overlaps the two categories of horror, the novel outlines numerous images that signal an existence of a 'horror that is universalised'. The images of cemetery where Beloved was buried, the gang-rape of Nan and Sethe's mother, the live burnings, the hangings and dismemberments of slaves like Sixo, Paul A and Sethe's mother are some of the horror incidents that Morrison deploys in the narrative and which occur in our day-to-day world. Moreover, the brutal beatings, the cases of suicide and insanity that strike the desperate slaves, the awful sexual harassments and incest represented in the novel are other horror instances that generally emanate from man's cruelty and which happen in the real world. The same phenomenon can also be found in *Song of Solomon* as well as in *Love, Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*. For instance, Smith's suicide, Macon Dead I's skeleton kept by Pilate, Solomon's flight, Ryna's insanity, Pilate's fatal shooting, Macon Dead's ghost talking with his children, Ruth Foster's potion of love to her husband Macon Jr. and Cholly's incestuous relation with his daughter Pecola have a natural link with what actually happens in the real environment. Besides, the conjuration of marigold seeds by Frieda and Claudia, Shadrack's mental depression

and hallucinations, the immolation of Plum by Eva, the unrestrained and the ferocious quarrels of the Cosey women correlate with what actually happens in the rational world. All these instances, though fictional, have a natural link in the rationally real world. Exploring the thematic aspect of Morrison's horror fiction, Bashirahishize (2017b) contends that

Morrison's oeuvre focuses primarily on the living conditions of the African American community. She feels great concern about the degrading social status that the American society seeks to impose permanently over the subaltern. Morrison seeks to subvert this depraved and corrupt hegemony. She is heart-stricken to see humans abuse other humans in a time when humanity has attained a significant stage in terms of human rights advancement...Morrison's focal point centers around the struggle for socio-cultural recognition of the African American community amid the predominant white culture (p.43).

The writer's struggle seeks to redefine and situate the 'black history' in the current socio-cultural context of an inclusive society. We mentioned earlier that Morrison's fiction utilises profoundly universal horror to paint generally the issues of contemporary America and give a concise flashback on the past. It facilitates permeability and reinforces the writer's creative powers as the access to raw materials proves efficient and easy. Furthermore, Morrison's imagination does not emerge from a vacuum: the local neighbourhood of Lorain and its vicinities constitute the initial source of inspiration. As a case in point, many of her works such as *The Bluest Eye* are set in this region. The cultural heritage into which the past and the present coalesce is also an important dynamic for Morrison's literary creation. But the most influential and inspiring source in Morrison's art is the socio-political instability that the writer indicates to be the main cause of human debasement (*Playing in the Dark*, 1992, p. 27). All these sources provide the writer with possibilities to build incidents that connect the audience to the ordinary world. In some cases, the natural feature of the universal horror she applies strikes the supernatural incidents which tend to

become normal despite their paranormal identity. Being a ghost, Beloved's identity is, by nature, supernatural. However, the long stay in her mother's home transforms her nearly into a human being as she eats, sleeps, plays with her sister Denver and her mother Sethe. After the ghost is rid of the house forever, Sethe laments its parting, "She left me...She was my best thing" (p.272). This lamentation suggests that Sethe saw her daughter-ghost more human than spirit. In this context, the supernatural straddles the boundaries of the real and the unreal to combine both the natural and supernatural features. The unreal is perceived as real since human conscience is familiar with the presence of ghosts among humans.

For the audience, the universal horror renders Morrison's writing accessible and easy to absorb. For instance, the filicide Sethe commits while attempting to keep her children away from the harm of the white man can easily be understood in line with the severe consequences of the cruelty of slavery. In this case, the filicide which is part of universal horror connects directly the reader to the bitter realities of human cruelty.

In many ways, instances of universal horror that Morrison brings in her fiction are used within metaphorical structure. In *Song of Solomon*, Macon Jr. despises his wife Ruth; he decides to sever all family relations starting by his wife. Thirsty of her husband that she truly loves, Ruth obtains a potion from her sister-in-law, Pilate. Secretly, she administers the philter to her husband. As a result, he unconsciously breaks the severance and sleeps with his wife for only four days during which she conceives (p.137). Potion is a magic drink with a twofold effect: healing and killing. It takes the reader to the world of witchcraft. This world is not new to Morrison's readers: witchcraft and sorcery are commonplace in the lives of Lorain community

and both are part of the traditional ways of life of its inhabitants. We learn from *The Bluest Eye* that Frieda and her sister Claudia conjure marigold seeds to attempt a chance of life for the unborn baby that Pecola is pregnant with. Though witchcraft and sorcery can be understood within the limits of occultism and, by extension, of supernaturalism, they have something natural in them. In some societies, they are regarded as part of people's tradition; and according to Mint (2013), these cultural practices can define and confer a particular identity to both its practitioners and beneficiaries because

Occultism is part of society's defining identities. In its various forms, participants acquire an extra-categorization that keeps them askew the collective custom—not because what they do is against community itself but because the collective understanding fails to acknowledge the status they should hold amid diverse lives of a community. Hence, in its exterior manifestations of witchcraft, sorcery, poisoning, primal initiation or necromancy, community members are practitioners, beneficiaries and victims (p.117).

In using the universal horror, Morrison succeeds to address appropriately issues pertaining to an individual as well as to the collective challenges of a society. The appalling incidents that occur in *Beloved* portray the collective trauma of the African American people. They discourse about the upsetting experiences of blacks as a community under agony caused by slavery. She favors commonality in this novel in that the issues of slavery it discusses defy society in its holistic dimensions. This commonality represented through the multi-facets of universal horror seeps into the readers' minds and enables them to understand the challenges that a community is confronted with. The readers feed on the disgust and revulsion provided by the universality of the incidents.

Morrison's universal horror also includes circumstances that portray issues of an individual in their private existence. Morrison knows that beside common challenges

people meet in society, there are particular issues that concern an individual in their personal existence. In *Love*, for instance, Morrison discusses such personal matters which oppose the ‘Cosey women’ whom each tries to win the deceased Bill Cosey’s possessions by all means. Pecola’s preoccupation to obtain blue eyes in order to secure beauty in *The Bluest Eye* is not a concern for the whole African American society though some young black adolescent girls manifest an inflated interest in the corporeal beauty. The elopement of Sula with Nel’s husband Jude Greene, when they are caught red-handed fornicating, is a matter of private affair although it results in the profanation of cultural values of the community (*Sula*, p.89). All these incidents highlight the individual challenges a person experiences in their private life. Morrison deploys again universal horror to approach the conflicts that shake individuals’ private lives and which can affect society. Incidents borrowed from this horror assist the writer to represent the multiple layers of people’s morality and feelings. In the treatment of individuals’ privacies, the universal horror gives a panoptic view of people’s problems that are usually ignored by society.

2.5.2.2 The unconventional horror

The discussion of the nature of horror in Morrison’s fiction is very problematic. In the section above, we have indicated that Morrison’s horror fiction rests on two literary aspects: the universal horror and the unconventional horror. This section explores how the second type of the writer’s horror—that this study terms *unconventional horror*—works in her novels.

While the universal horror draws on what exists in the real world which is common to human beings and their environment, the *unconventional horror* proves the opposite. It is limited in its scope and relies on what has neither physical nor mental existence

in the real world. It emanates from Morrison's 'free imagination' of incidents, situations and circumstances that have no rational existence in the natural world. This horror is not part of supernatural fiction though it escapes the boundaries of the rational world. Supernatural literature, in its magical aspect, presupposes an existence of its imagined incidents, characters, symbols and images in the real world. This aspect does not apply to unconventional horror. The unconventional horror is a free form of the writer's imagination characterised by a lack of connection to the real world. It is this feature that makes it different from the supernatural horror. In its workings, there is neither physical nor mental identification of an existing referent in the rational world.

Song of Solomon presents Pilate, a lady who was "born with no navel" (p.112). Significantly, this implies that she was not physiologically linked to her biological mother. Such a conception defies the laws of nature and cannot exist in the real world. Yet, Pilate is not a descendant of extraterrestrials like a god and goddess as it was commonplace in the classical Greek mythology. The narrative indicates that Pilate is a daughter of humans—Macon Dead I being her father and Sing her mother. From a rationally natural perspective, Pilate's conception with no navel is not linked to the human world. Yet, she is represented by the writer as a human being. This birth cannot be considered a supernatural phenomenon; we saw that in its workings, the supernatural has some connectedness with nature in that supernatural incidents borrow raw materials from the real world or interact with humans who are part of the rational world. The long domiciliation of Beloved as a ghost in her mother's home and Macon Dead's ghost entertaining with his children Macon Jr. and Pilate illustrate, for instance, the existing connectedness between the supernatural and the natural world. But the conception and birth of Pilate have no logical connection with

nature. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's leg starts growing shorter gradually and unexpectedly (p.82). Yet, Milkman has no pain or disease responsible for this paranormal change. The physical deformity occurs abruptly to traumatise the young adolescent who feels lessened among his peers.

Beside these situations, an appropriate example of unconventional horror appears in *Beloved*. Eighteen years after her death, Beloved returns home from grave as a ghost. She shows up at 124 where her family still lives. There, she meets her mother Sethe, her grandmother Baby Suggs, her brothers Howard and Burglar, and her sister Denver. At this juncture, the ghostly identity of Beloved makes her a supernatural being; and her return from grave as a ghost corresponds to the extraterrestrial existence of ghosts and vampires which sometimes make irruption into the real world of humans. However, that Beloved arrives in the family, stays there for years, eats, drinks, sleeps and entertains with her mother naturally and beyond all has sex with Paul D is beyond supernatural account. From the spectral identity, she veers into a transitional state that stands between a human and a ghost. This state cannot have a match either in the supernatural world or in the real one. Wiseman (2012) asserts that "this ambivalent state of Morrison's horror reiterates the duality of life" (p.47). This phenomenon that overlaps the real and the unreal together is also another case of unconventional horror that the writer applies in the texts under study.

This category of horror has been described as unconventional horror with reference to its origin and how it works in the texts. It has been labelled "unconventional" because it defies the rules of the natural or "conventional" world which is the warehouse of Morrison's horror in general. Its incidents, events and situations have no common trait to define their nature: each incident or event is unique in its origin and how it portrays

a message in the narrative. They are independent in action and follow no rule. Unlike the universal horror which depicts the writer's thought into a twofold imagination of commonality and individuality, unconventional horror portrays issues that concern an individual at personal level. It addresses issues that impact an individual in their private existence.

The scope of unconventional horror is very narrow. In its action, Morrison generally applies this style to create digressive instances in the narrative. Used as digression, incidents of unconventional horror rarely occur at the beginning of a narrative or at the end. They usually occur in the advanced stages of a story to revitalise the reader whose interest in the narrative has been depleted by the disgusting scenes. The presence of these instances mitigates the appalling atmosphere of the uncanny instances generated by the universal horror by creating a balanced climate which shall enable the reader to enjoy the story and proceed further delightfully.

Baldick (2001) holds that "digression is a temporary departure from one subject to another more or less distantly related topic before the discussion of the first subject is resumed" (p.67). The critic maintains that it is "a valuable technique in the storytelling...employed in many kinds of non-fictional writing and oratory" (p.67). Similarly, the unconventional horror that Morrison employs in her narratives initiates a diversion from the thematic incidents being portrayed to the minor unrelated episodes; this situation creates a noticeable distance from the central point. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison introduces Pilate's state of lack of a navel after a series of baleful incidents that include Macon Jr.'s philtre and the mysterious meeting of Macon Dead's ghost with his children. The account of Pilate's physiological abnormality

which intervenes later in the story constitutes a ‘departure from’ the main ‘subject’ that the narrative addresses as Baldick indicates.

In the same light, Ofuani (1988) indicates how digression works and the context in which it is applied. For the critic

What marks a digression is precisely the fact that "it is not directly related, syntactically, semantically, and even pragmatically, to the main conversational distribution of its adjacent utterances." In short, a digression does not fit into the "mainstream of conversation". It breaks the pattern which consists in each utterance adequately "responding" to the preceding one, a pattern which seems to characterize any non-digressive stretch of conversation (p.312).

Ofuani’s conception of digression meets also Morrison’s construction of the unconventional horror. This style does not fall into the ‘mainstream’ of the story. Milkman’s dwindling leg and Pilate’s paranormal status of ‘*navel-lessness*’ do not give a significant meaning to the overall context and finality of the novel. In addition, as Ofuani states, these instances of unconventional horror ‘break’ the normal stream of the storyline. Since they function as addenda to the story, they can neither influence nor alter the main orientations of the narrative. It goes the same with *Beloved*’s newly acquired ‘social’ identity of behaving and acting like humans. The ‘fluidity’ of her identity adds nothing to the central focus traced by the novel. In the texts under study, unconventional horror reinforces emotional feelings. Readers feel pity of Milkman losing his leg mysteriously under helpless observation. Great pity is felt when the reader recollects that this physical deformity costs him a loss of his physical esteem as a young adolescent.

2.5.3 The grotesque in Morrison’s horror fiction

In Chapter One, we mentioned that this study focuses on the nature of horror, its meaning and function in Morrison’s novels. In a horror setting, the grotesque plays an

important role in the imagination of incidents and plot construction. Talking about the grotesque in a study of horror brings then the reader to question the nexus existing between these two concepts in an art centred on the weird to discuss social predicament. Briefly, 'grotesque' carries a negative undertone to refer to what appears distorted and incongruous. In this case, the concept entails a sense of the strange, the ludicrous and the upsetting that depicts something which is out of place. Strictly applied in art and literature, the concept of the 'grotesque' is most importantly used to denote a style that consists in blending the realistic and the fantastic.

Philip Thomson, in his work *The Grotesque* (1972), describes the grotesque as “a fundamentally ambivalent thing, as a clash of opposites, and hence, in some forms at least, as an approximate expression of the problematic nature of existence” (p.11). Thomson's argument highlights the negative apprehension that characterises this style. It basically relies on what goes against an individual's acceptable expectations and informs about the socio-cultural and psychological disturbances that trouble one's self. In the same perspective, Thomson indicates that there “is no accident that the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to be prevalent in societies and eras marked by strife, radical changes or disorientation” (p.19). This section on the grotesque in Morrison's texts approaches the concept in the limited sense of the distorted and the incongruous which dominate the narrative line of the texts under study.

Initially, the grotesque recalls a presence of an abject or uncanny environment. In the beginning, the grotesque was applied in visual arts to design artistic representations in painting and sculpture to comment on various historical challenges and to depict the conflicts between body and mind. The artistic works of the Renaissance Italian artist Michelangelo such as the Sistine Chapel's painting of the *Last Judgement* (1508-

1512), the sculptures of *The Pietà* (1497-1500) and *Dying Slave* (1513-1516) are iconographic representations of the permanent conflict existing between body and mind. All these works, though different in forms and themes, have something in common: they portray life in a desperate state, showing abject bodies of individuals under pain and grief on the verge of collapse. Clayborough (1965) observes that grotesque works portray a “rejection of natural order not merely the sense of ‘strange’ but that of ‘abidingly strange’” (p.89). Morrison’s grotesque reveals the profanation of the social order that has been altered by the leading structure to gratify its egotistical privileges by keeping aside the other.

In Morrison’s horror fiction, the presence of polarity between characters depicts grotesque scenery as exemplified by Sula and the community members of the Bottom in *Sula*. The misconduct of Sula which leads to her isolation as a social misfit provides a grotesque picture in a community of blacks who experience collective alienation from the white community of Medallion. These whites are expelling the black community as they want to erect a golf course in a land that belongs to the helpless blacks. Rather than develop a collective consciousness to defend her waning community with others, Sula’s preoccupation lies in the gratification of sexual lust—an act that infuriates the black community of the Bottom.

In the examination of reader-response outcome, Harpham (1976) observes that the grotesque dies away whenever there is no laughter which accompanies the event. For the critic, laughter is an important feature of a grotesque scene. Yet, this observation is not possible for all circumstances that raise the grotesque. In many situations of grotesquerie, fear which results from the terrifying incidents replaces laughter. The uncanny occurrences can rarely prompt laughter; in such abject situations, the reader

feels empathetic with the victim. Sethe's deformed back due to brutal beatings that have transformed it into a chokecherry tree cannot produce laughter even in a sardonic setting. Her upsetting revelations, "I got a tree on my back...a chokecherry tree, that's all," (*Beloved*, p.79) cannot trigger laughter. Because the distortions of her back link the reader to the cruelty of slavery, one feels disturbed by the psychological and physical pain that slaves experienced at the hand of the white man. Yet these distortions have transformed her back into a grotesque body even though they do not produce laughter. At first sight, for an individual who has little knowledge about Sethe's past, the scars in form of a tree give an impression of an intricate pattern of tattoo that has been designed to beautify her back.

In art, form and content are important dynamics for artists and writers to explore the complexities of human existence. Grotesque literature can have the qualities of being grotesque either in content or form. The content normally refers to the subject matter that a work explores while the form relates to the structure under which the work is built.

With regard to form, grotesque literature explores the literary aspects of style including stream of consciousness, broken narrations with multiple narrators within a single work, and sometimes unrelated chapter organisations that render the plot cumbersome (Thomson, p. 64). In some novels, there may be two protagonists with equal voice and power—a situation that looks odd in the typical process of narration. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is built upon this unfamiliar construction. It evolves with melodramatic characters with two major narrators, Nelly Dean and Lockwood. In an unusual and complex narrative organisation, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)—a novel of ten chapters—takes place within a single day and is

articulated upon an intricate style of stream of consciousness which turns the plot strange. The intricate state of the narrative is heightened by the presence of the two protagonists—Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith—who seek to compete one against another without having a winner. This intricate organisation of *Mrs. Dalloway* where the stream of consciousness destroys the logical structure of the narration and therefore creates ambiguity in the chronology and meaning of the portrayed incidents is also found in the narrative structure of Morrison's *Love* in many instances of the narrative. *Love*'s narration and incidents' structure portray a grotesque world where the three supposedly kin women destroy one another to inherit unfairly Bill Cosey's bequest.

In the novel, the stream of consciousness makes the narration complex and transforms the story into a mixture of unrelated passages. In some stages of the plot, the late landlord Bill Cosey is portrayed as a living character while the story opens many years after his death. The quarrel of the women resurrects Bill and positions him at the centre of the women. In addition, the visceral strife between Heed, May and Christine—respectively Bill Cosey's widow, daughter-in-law and granddaughter, reinforces the grotesque landscape that is culminated by ruse and chicanery plotted by each character to cheat the other. Celestial was Bill Cosey's mistress whom the departed Cosey preferred to bequeath. Her presence on Cosey's will ignites the tension and the nonsensical hatred which polarise the three women. The conflict creates an uncanny climate in the story. This conflict is basically discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation while exploring the effect of disruption prompted by the presence of a multiple voice structure in the process of narration.

With regard to content, the grotesque appears through the writer's portrayal of mentally or physically disabled characters, monomaniacal characters and some horrifying comic events. We have seen how Morrison originates the unconventional horror and how it works in her fiction. In *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, Eva's deliberate choice to lose a leg and become physically lame to secure financial means, Milkman's dwindling leg and Pilate's mysterious birth with no navel are uncanny situations that raise dread on one side and bring about laughter on the other side to create a grotesque atmosphere. The reader experiences both laughter and fear from these events: it is unimaginable that an individual deliberately surrenders part of their body for the sake of money. Eva's loss of a leg is not accidental: it is a premeditated act that she has planned with the objective to collect an insurance support. At this juncture, Eva's disability produces laughter. She has become disabled upon her own choice. The reader feels no pity for her newly physical state though it threatens her existence when she reaches old age and thereby admitted to a nursing home for social assistance. This unfamiliar reaction of Eva attests the eviction of her self by the controlling force of the id that has conquered and subjugated her conscious mind. The uncanny loss of her leg due to the deliberate accident provides at a time horror and a grotesque mood. However, when the reader goes back to recollect on how the same mother decided to sacrifice her leg in order to save her family from an acute starvation, a feeling of compassion runs through. At this time, Eva's disability produces fear. These two states experienced by the reader about Eva's disability prompt grotesque scenery where laughter and fear coalesce to represent the woman's success and agony.

Milkman's mysterious leg spawns also an uncanny look yet which induces grotesque. Beyond the horrifying transformation, a corporeal transmutation that happens without a cause is hard to stand and endure. Milkman is a healthy young boy with no pain;

yet, he sees his leg petering out gradually. At some stage, his dwindling state of the leg introduces a comical scene and raises laughter. In fact, the victim's surrounding perceives the fading state of his leg as a retribution for his arrogant nature. In this case, his physical deformity triggers a grotesque state.

While many incidents in *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* portray the grotesque from a physical dimension, a lot of instances in *The Bluest Eye* depict the grotesque from abstract scenes that have either a psychological or magical dimension. At the early age of nine, Claudia and Frieda MacTeer, know how to manipulate magic. Upon magical skills the two sisters have acquired, the little girls conjure marigold seeds that assist them to determine the future of Pecola's unborn baby (p.69). Morrison creates an impressive grotesque scene in the narrative. It is difficult to understand that, at the early age of nine, a child has already acquired skills and maturity to enter the magical world and operate magic exploits. Claudia and Frieda succeed to prove that Pecola's baby will not actually live once it is born. The evidence is proven by the seeds that they sow in the ground upon conjuration and they never germinate. The impossibility of germination which metaphorically implies demise foreshadows the death of the baby which is stillborn after some days of the exploit.

Furthermore, Cholly Breedlove's double molestation of his own daughter appears horrifying on one side and grotesque on the other side. Had he raped her once, the crime would have been perceived as an ordinary case of incest. However, that he ingeminates to molest the girl for a second time appears abnormal and creates a grotesque mood in the mind of the reader. A grotesque encounter is again observed with Cholly who is instructed to continue having sex under the watchful eye of two white men who catch him having sex with his lover Darlene just for his first time in

life (p. 87). In many cases, Morrison generally deploys the grotesque to portray the conflict between body and mind on one side and the alienation of the African American existence on the other side.

Morrison constructs another important scene of the grotesque with a psychological dimension in *Song of Solomon*. At the onset of the story, we are presented with a macabre scene of Robert Smith committing suicide before a public he has himself invited. Mr. Smith, an agent of North Carolina Mutual Life insurance, boasts that he can fly from atop Mercy Hospital and reach the other side of Lake Superior. While flying, Smith counts on his “blue silk wings” to succeed in the venture (p.1). Paradoxically, he has invited an assembly of fellow blacks to come and watch him. Among the assembly, there is Pilate who comically sings a lyrical song to laugh at Smith’s misadventure, “O Sugarman done fly away/ Sugarman done gone/ Sugarman cut across the sky/ Sugarman gone home...” (p.6).

In this opening passage of the narrative, there are many suggestive images that indicate a grotesque undertaking. Although every case of suicide must generally have a cause, Smith’s death somehow produces laughter. Considering his profession of life protection, it is absurd to see an individual whose career is to promote life commit suicide. What makes the situation more grotesque is the encouragement he collects from his fellow blacks who have come to watch the young agent plummet to death. Morrison builds a grotesque atmosphere upon an ironic style. The reader becomes curious of Morrison’s impressive juxtaposition of flight and encouragement that prelude Smith’s own destruction. The assembly feels emotionally uplifted to watch Smith fly while they are actually sure he is not able to. There is an element of laughter that Morrison brings in to succeed the construction of a grotesque undertaking. The

scene sounds funny and appears comical in the mind of the reader. The pity for a dying person vanishes under the weight of the situational hinges that Morrison deploys to construct this scene.

Smith's suicide is rooted in the accumulated dissatisfactions caused by racial alienation that has developed an uncanny sense of uncertainty in his existence. Jentsch (1906), the precursor of the psychoanalytic theory of 'The Uncanny', has described the concept 'Uncanny' as a result of "intellectual uncertainty...something one does not know one's way about it" (p. 26). It is the uncertainty in form of absurdity of human existence that drives Smith to suicide. The uncanny experience that he chooses to perform and which puts an end to his life cuts short the painful existence he has been enduring. While flying, Smith wears 'blue' silk wings, a colour suggesting 'gloom' and 'disaster' as the adjective is most metaphorically used in certain expressions like *blue feeling* or *blue day*. Shortly before he jumps, death already smells up in the place. The 'blue' wings insinuate something implicit, something dreadful, an impending danger that awaits the young insurance agent. While Pilate sings humorously about the tragic disappearance of Smith—"Sugarman gone *home*"—she compares his death to a home, a relieving domicile that ends his pain. For Pilate, Smith does not die; he secures a permanent relief that wipes out all the pain he has endured for ages.

In his observation, Kayser (1963) notes that the grotesque "results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence" (p.37). Like the unconventional horror, Morrison deploys the grotesque in her narratives as part of horror to portray the alienation of the African American community within a

predominantly white culture. While the grotesque in literature generally departs from the familiar, the writer usually imagines situations that are far from the ordinary occurrences: human flights, children's magic world, self-mutilations or bodily transmutations are not part of human beings' tradition. To symbolise the ugly and bitter reality blacks are experiencing, Morrison uses hyperbolic language to reach an appropriate construction of a grotesque portrayal. The description of Milkman's petering leg is achieved through language magnification that generates empathy to the reader. The grotesque view of Eva Peace's amputated leg depicts the decaying American society which is on the verge of collapse. These uncanny yet grotesque deformities mark the threshold of social decline.

An overall observation indicates that much about grotesque characters in the texts under study deals with black characters. In fact, the writer adopts a distorted and monstrous representation centred on black characters as a way to reveal the destruction of black humanity. We have mentioned that a 'magnifying' portrayal is a defining feature of Morrison's grotesque style. In any case, even when the exaggeration in images, events, characters and situations is evident, an element of truth is always present.

Although it is applied in some works in form of laughter to provide entertainment, the grotesque is generally used to warn people about the existence of destructive forces that can ruin human existence. This warning is the important motivation why authors combine the grotesque and horror in their works. They want to remind people of their role and responsibility as human beings in the advancement of humanity. The warning works both on the existing and futuristic grounds regarding what the society experiences at the present and what shall happen in the future should human

irrationality and wickedness persist to undermine society's foundations. In this way, Morrison uses the grotesque to reinforce the action of horror as a possibility to warn the white community against the dangers it is running. For the writer, the alienation blacks are experiencing in the present may affect the white community in the future if there is no veritable social consciousness to end the evils which are debasing America. To exemplify the futuristic gloom that would afflict the white community, Morrison creates incidents in which white characters fall victims of the wrongs brought by racism. In *Song of Solomon*, Guitar Bains is member of the Seven Day, a secret organisation of blacks whose objective is to avenge black casualties by killing whites whether innocent or not. In *Beloved*, Sethe nearly splits the head of the white abolitionist, Mr. Edward Bodwin, whom she confounds with her former torturer schoolteacher (p.89). All these vindictive incidents indicate that the future of the white community is uncertain.

In Thomson's view, the grotesque is an "aggressive weapon" that provides readers a possibility to get multiple perceptions of a society's concerns (ibid., p.58). Morrison's grotesque based on disabled bodies depicts the oppressive systems of racism and patriarchy in America. Writers also utilise the grotesque to mitigate the intensity of a terrifying scene. Upon the presence of this psychological mitigation, readers can easily absorb the atrocities presented in the narrative. This mitigation invigorates also victims of horror to face heroically its pain. Such a mitigation results from laughter or relieving mood which accompanies grotesque performances. The element of laughter lessens the horrifying intensity by making it less daunting and relatively soft. We saw how Eva's deliberate choice to lose her leg in order to gain money softens the reader's condemnation when he learns that the woman did so in a way to secure financial possibilities to save her family from an unprecedented starvation. The black

community of the Bottom considers her act partly suicidal on one side and partly heroic on the other side for the self-sacrifice she bore out. While she faces hate on one side, she reaps sympathy and admiration on the other.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the nature and significance of horror in the five texts of Toni Morrison. The analysis has shown that the use of horror, which is developed through multiple facets in her novels, enables readers to have an appropriate view of the socio-cultural and historical perspectives of the African American existence. The study found out that Morrison's horror rests on two hinges to capture black experience: the universal horror and the unconventional horror. In the overall observation, the writer applies the two types of horror to reveal the fragmentation and alienation of the African American community. The writer's style shows that the grotesque feeds on the horror to depict the conflicts between body and mind. Its presence in the narratives mitigates abhorrence and disgust generated by the horrifying incidents to render the narratives easily accessible.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE OF DISRUPTION IN THE REPRESENTATION OF SOCIETAL MALAISE

3.1 Introduction

Narrative processes play an important function in the construction of meaning of a text. The structure of a story constitutes an essential dynamic that creates the life of a text. Morrison's novels are built upon a rich tapestry of narrative techniques that strengthen her writing both in form and content. This chapter looks at how the narrative strategy of disruption works in her writing to reveal the fragmentation of the American society. In her works, narratological tools are deployed primarily to paint the African American human condition that the writer portrays using an intricate style. In many cases, these tools serve "to represent a grief beyond words" that has been brought by the evils of racism and the subsequent social inequalities (Philips, 2015, p.108). Broken forms of narrations are a predominant feature that characterises the narrative esthetics in her works. In many stages, the past cuts the present in the narrative line while some actions are left unfinished to prompt other actions that evolve and end up in a differently strange manner. These disruptions in the writer's narrative style mirror the misfortunes and the disrupted identities that characters experience in the struggle for liberation.

While Morrison's horror writing indicates an existence of a variety of numerous narrative proceedings that construct the structure of her fiction, the narrative technique of disruption is an important instrument the writer applies to upgrade both the textual construction and the associated meaning. This technique is a key-element that reveals the multiple facets of the historical black experience in America. First, the

analysis examines how Morrison employs disruption with regard to the textual constructions of the narratives; the study is essentially grounded in how utterances are built to reflect elaborate narratives based on the multiple points of view that are sporadically coupled with past and present narrations which cut alternatively to result in non-linear patterns dominated by significant flashbacks. Second, the study explores the narrative juxtaposition of the contrastive actions and reactions of characters which result in horror. In the end, it looks at the significance of the narrative strategy of defragmentation which collects and later unites the fragmented pieces to create a space of regeneration and social reaffirmation. Being a narrative investigation in the selected texts, the analytical process is basically guided by Vladimir Propp's narratological functions identified under the concept of Functions of dramatis personae developed in his essay *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968). Only does it rely on Kristeva's 'abjection' and Freud's 'Uncanny' in a few stages to discuss the instances of aversion that emerge from the disrupted textual constructions. The diversity of Propp's narratological functions enables the interpretation of the various reactions that characters undertake and which lead to textual fragmentation and characters' self-destruction.

3.2 Textual Narrative Disruption

3.2.1 The narrative interspersion of the past and the present

The most influential and predominant feature of Morrison's narrative style in the horror texts is the breaking of the linear narration that affects the chronological evolution of the story. In her works, the writer breaks the ordinary storyline and the work structure where past and present dislodge to form juxtaposed passages that break the flow of the story. The alternation of these tenses with unrelated events makes the

past actions alive in a way that the disjointed fragments coalesce to make a complete and unitary story.

The reader experiences these intermittent tense breakages generally in the narrative structures of *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon* and *Love*. In these novels, the chronological axis of the story gives way to a jumbled structure based on alternations of past and present events. For instance, the plot of *Beloved* traces various instances of the past—from the Middle Passage ship to the painful experiences of Sweet Home. The past narration extends also to the events after Sethe's evasion of Sweet Home to 124 in Cincinnati, where a veritable change in her life becomes effective. In many situations, the narrative past appears in three different ways yet which correlate through the entire plot: first it appears in flashbacks through actions done or afflictions endured by characters; second it appears in stories in form of folktales which come to reinforce the narrative; and finally it is used in the narratological processes generally to relate the third person narration as though it were a transposition of present tense into past to obtain the pastness of a present action.

In *Song of Solomon*, the reader comes to know the origins, the roots, the life and experiences of Solomon through sketchy narrative fragments of traditional folktales that Milkman receives from the relatives he meets at different stages of his exploratory journey. These fragments appear in the story in form of flashbacks and broaden the reader's insights about the developments of the story. The narrator enlightens the reader about how Milkman comes to know the identity of his great-grandfather Solomon on the basis of choral singings of folktales

Milkman...would just have to listen and memorize it. He closed his eyes and concentrated while the children, inexhaustible in their willingness to repeat a rhythmic, rhyming action game...And Milkman memorized all of what they sang:

Jake the only son of Solomon

Whirled about and touched the son

Left that baby in a white man's house

Heddy took him to a red man's house

Black lady fell down on the ground

Threw her body all around

Solomon and Ryna Belali Shalut

Twenty-one children, the last one Jake!
O Solomon don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Solomon don't leave me here
Bukra's arms to yoke me

Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home (pp. 306-307).

This choral folktale sums up the whole story of Solomon. Listening carefully to the tale, Milkman learns that Solomon was the real father to Jake identified in the text as Macon Dead, his grandfather. This is very useful information to trace back his ancestral roots. The important personalities in the historical life of Solomon are disclosed as well. From this choral excerpt of the folktale, the narrator informs the reader that Solomon was husband to Ryna and that the couple had twenty-one children, Jake being the last-born. Upon this narration in past, the reader also learns that when Ryna went insane due to abandonment after the flight of her husband Solomon, her last-born Jake was raised by the Indian woman Heddy whose daughter Sing married Jake afterwards. The event of flight which metaphorically suggests the

breakage of the chains of bondage is captured through a historical account of Solomon's deeds.

Upon Propp's idea of *guidance* as a narratological function, Milkman "is transferred, delivered and led to" a vital location that transforms his frail character into a mature individual (1968, p.46). He finally reaches the object of search that his journey was seeking to attain. Milkman is guided significantly by Circe to succeed his dream. Propp mentions that "the object of search is located in 'another' or 'different' kingdom," which "may lie far away horizontally, or else very high up or deep down vertically" (p.47). The empowerment of the protagonist originates from a place far away from home that he would not expect to answer his thirst for the quest for ancestral roots. In her role of *guidance* for the hero, Circe bridges the past and the present: Milkman who personifies the present comes to discover the history of his lineage upon the assistance of this woman who directs him in most important and historical sites of his ancestry disseminated in Virginia and its surroundings.

Beloved provides important narrative flashbacks that give the reader a significant background and context to the understanding of the whole story. In fact, while the plot of this novel starts *in medias res*, it would be difficult for a reader to understand the narrative line of the novel so long as it is neither prologued nor technically introduced. These flashbacks add important information to the reader's knowledge and create necessary awareness to situate him within the context of the story. Much about the revelations of Morrison's fiction unveils from the secrecy hidden in the flashbacks. It is from these narrative analepses, for instance, that we come to know the supernatural identity of Beloved and the reason why she returns back as a ghost in the family to torment her mother.

In her works, Morrison builds narratives in which the past and the present act together in the portrayal of incidents. In the narrative line of *Beloved*, the writer deploys these two tenses in two remote time settings to relate the story. Particularly, the past time is utilised to relate events surrounding the 1850s when Sethe was sold at market and bought as a slave by the Garners to work in their plantations in Sweet Home, Kentucky (104 ff.). On the other side, the present time generally used in a narratological past, is employed to relate what happens in 124 when the novel opens and what follows, fulfilling the role of connecting events and situations in the plot. The onset of the novel is indicative to this point, “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.” (p. 1). In the texts, the juxtaposition of the past and the present transforms past actions into a present mode which confers them an aspect of presentness that makes them alive. Hence, the past becomes part of the present; and this translation makes the two times dependent on one another. The resulting disruptive effect is that these times become hazy at a certain degree. The narratological past restricts the pastness of past events. Most incidents are set in the past time; yet this past is actively dynamic thanks to the recurrences of flashbacks at various stages in the narration. The narratives follow a broken trail in which the past and the present move back and forth to lose delineation between them.

The narratological development of *Love*, for instance, resurrects Bill Cosey, dead many years ago at the time the narrative starts. In the constant memories and quarrels of the Cosey house, the women pretend as heirs to Bill interact fantastically to the point that the departed parent and husband Bill Cosey reappears through the women’s excessive rage and hatred. While disputing over the will left by Bill Cosey to inherit

his possessions, dead Cosey is resurrected and the narration places him in the centre of the women who try to appropriate him each to her own advantage.

Beloved provides the same picture. A lot of events unfold in the present time: a ghost is haunting Sethe's house; after many years of separation, Paul D arrives unexpectedly at Sethe's home '124': she is relieved by his presence. He contributes considerably to rid the family of the ghost. Later, when he learns that the ghost is a reincarnation of Sethe's baby that she herself murdered eighteen years ago, he is disappointed and leaves her unexpectedly. Yet, he comes back again to Sethe's home after some days. In her distress, Sethe is assisted by the black community which, in part, ostracises her for the crime she committed. They participate in dragging away the ghost. In the end of the novel, the ghost runs away for good. All these events around Sethe's life unfold in the present. Although they are narrated into a past tense, they reveal in detail the current issues of the struggle of the protagonist. The novel ends with a dawn of hope marked by the disappearance of the ghost. In effect, the narrative closes with Propp's *liquidation* that sets a positive *denouement* which relieves the hero. The uncertainty and restlessness that featured Sethe's home are gone with the ghost. In liquidation phase, Propp states that "the initial misfortune or lack is *liquidated* giving a new possibility to the hero to ascend to victory over their villain" (Ibid. p.59). Although *Beloved* cannot be truly perceived as a villain with regard to her mother's past fatal violence that she inflicted her while alive, *Beloved* instigates trouble that turns Sethe wretched and totally desolate. Thanks to a successful exorcism of the ghost, the earlier hardships of the protagonist are worked out: the ghost is *liquidated*, chased from the home forever. In the end of the narrative, Sethe's house is rid of the ghost of *Beloved* that had transformed her home into a lair where only terror and fear reigned. The family recovers solace; Sethe and her

daughter Denver start to regain progressively social trust in the community that has isolated them for a long time.

Though the whole narrative is sporadically cut by flashbacks, there is little regularity in the narration of events that take place in the present. Often, some of these events succeed to one another and are only interrupted by an earlier past event after a relatively specific period of narration. Events that happened in the past, however, are narrated into fragments that fill the gap in the reader's broken knowledge while reading. For instance, the reader comes to know the horrors of slavery or the causes of descent into depression for Baby Suggs through an anecdotal account of a heterodiegetic narrator

It made sense for a lot of reasons because in all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women 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. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children...Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her--only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. "God take what He would," she said. And He did, and He did, and He did and then gave her Halle who gave her freedom when it didn't mean a thing (p.23).

In *Beloved*, this double narration—in present and in past—describes basically the painful rememory of Sethe's past. The narration itself creates an unusual state that raises ambiguities in the life of the protagonist. The scattered fragments of flashbacks that describe in a disrupted and dislocated way the bitterness of Sethe's past and her fellow blacks, entail in detail the horrors that black people experienced during the time of enslavement. These fragmented narrations that predominate Morrison's horror

fiction are in fact an expression of the fragmented lives of the black community both in past and in present. The narrator describes this fragmentation with awe and empathy

Suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too (p. 6).

We observe that the sequence of events is shuffled at irregular intervals bringing the narration into another world. In the deployment of this narrative disruption, Morrison engages her readers to discover a horrific world in which bits of the past and the present float together to create both harmony and chaos depicting the hopes and agony that featured the human condition of the African Americans through time. This narration reposes on a structure that leaves space between the past and the present fragments; and it requires the reader to partake actively in the meanings of the events.

Morrison herself asserts this necessity of reader's participation in her interview with MacKay (1994), "My writing expects, demands participatory reading...the reader supplies the emotions. The reader even supplies some of the colors, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces. So the reader can come into it" (p.27). These holes and spaces that Morrison leaves her reader create a multifaceted perception of the African American dilemma. They provide numerous possibilities to the understanding of the challenges American society is facing. In some situations, an unusually odd co-occurrence of the past and present fragments signals the predicament of the main characters. For instance, while Paul D muses over his awful past of oral sexual assault by the white guards of Alfred Prison, a new sense of manhood emerges and unconsciously sleeps with Beloved—a ghost by nature. When Sethe learns that Paul D has had sex with her daughter-ghost Beloved, the man loses

temper and feels ashamed. He feels guilty and psychologically debilitated (*Beloved*, p.167). While accepting Beloved's advances, Paul D seeks intentionally to overlook the past but the wound is too deep to forget. The past always haunts him and he tries to escape in vain.

Pilate and her brother Macon Jr. in *Song of Solomon* are terrified by an unexpected encounter with the ghost of their father, dead years ago (p.67). They start questioning his return and the validity of the revelations that the father-ghost discloses them about his tragic death. This past which intrudes into the present of the siblings makes them skeptical: it creates a psychological tension in Pilate as well as in Macon Jr. to know if really the ghost's propositions have a credible significance.

In *Sula*, Morrison's juxtaposition of Shadrack's past experiences in World War One and his present miserable life in the Bottom reveals a certain incompatibility in his conception of human existence. He has lost all sense of life and beholds the present as an enemy to his survival. This hatred is converted into a self-conviction that real peace of an oppressed mind should be gained at the price of suicide. With this conviction, he calls upon black people to commit suicide or kill one another in order to end the plight they are enduring (p.78).

In the same way, Sethe tells her daughter Denver that memory "...is never going away. Even if...every tree and grass blade of it dies," so long as "the picture is still there...it will happen again; it will be there waiting for you," any character can be affected by the past in any way whatsoever and in a present setting. This involvement with the past in a present setting engenders uncanny occurrences that those characters try to surmount painfully. Schadrack is insane due to the impossibility to match the past and the present in his existence (*Sula*, p.87). He perceives the world around him

as filthy and tries to 'compartmentalize' his fears into the troubled mind. Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* becomes insane too as he loses connection with the present marred by an ominously shameful past which is at the origin of his alien behaviour. In fact, after he has impregnated his daughter Pecola, a social curse falls on him; the community condemns him of the crime he has deliberately committed (p.102). Run by a feeling of uncontrolled madness, he sets fire to the family house and later dies in a workhouse. It can be argued that the past and the present in Morrison's horror fiction counteract each other and rarely do they meet to redefine a new way of life that would ensure characters an established solace. Sethe always seeks to work hard in order to "beat back the past" that has demeaned her existence (*Beloved*, p.73). In her struggle, the recollections of the past bury the hopes to reach a considerable existence in a society where racial ideology threatens social relations between individuals of different colors.

Most chapters of the texts under study start with a narratological present that is disrupted at various intervals by a narratological past dominated by events from memory. The disruption is generally reinforced by departures of characters who leave home for other particular spaces, sometimes to return after a long period, or never to return at all. These departures that initiate "Absention" in Propp's terms (ibid. p.48) create a void that jeopardises both the security of the character's home and his personal dealings.

In the events linked to memory, Morrison brings in inner monologues that reveal the predicament of the main characters. Part Two of *Beloved* in its chapters Two, Three and Four, for instance, presents the interior monologues of Sethe, Denver and Beloved in which the reader observes a certain blend of the past and the present.

Although these monologues cannot be looked at as an output of stream of consciousness, there is an unusual and incoherent punctuation that the writer adopts in the writing process. In these monologues, Morrison imagines Beloved who represents the past (dead eighteen years ago) in order to show her audience how the past is linked to the present and how the two times influence one another. Being an embodiment of the past, Beloved in her ghostly identity interacts with Sethe and Denver as humans do. She challenges her mother Sethe, questions her over the reasons of her tragic death; she plays with her sister Denver every day and most inconceivably has sex with Paul D. All these events happen in the present with an instigator who does not have a fully acknowledged existence in the present. Sethe wants to escape this intrusion. While escaping, she deliberately decides to forget whatever has ramifications with the past; but her attempt seems difficult. She is drowned into recollections of her painful past of eighteen years ago. The hanging of her mother, the theft of her maternal milk and the sexual harassment she underwent under the wickedness of schoolteacher and beyond all the infanticide of her nursing baby tear apart her ego. She is psychologically affected by the reoccurrence of such a bitter past that she had started to forget. This state of extreme anxiety is exacerbated by the unexpected return of a ghost of the one she lost out of love. However, the guilt of killing her baby devastates her existence as a mother. Convinced that the dead (Beloved) has the right to know the reality of the past in order to secure a psychological healing, Sethe resolves to find an occasion to explain to Beloved what really happened to them eighteen years earlier. Yet, with a broken heart filled with an emotional bond of motherhood, the reconciliation of the past and the present is hard to achieve.

Morrison shows that Sethe remains a slave of the past. The writer instills in her audience that human life always straddles over the boundaries of the past and the present to have meaning. She demonstrates how it is difficult for humans to detach from the past. Shocked by the dehumanising treatments of the Twentieth Century, the writer highlights the interdependence between the past and the present to advance social humaneness.

While *Beloved* discourses on the effects of slavery on black existence in America, *Love* explores the challenges that the African American community faced in the post-Second World War and post-Civil Rights movement in America. However, like *Beloved's* narrative, *Love* discourses on numerous interactions of events that happened in the past and others which occur at the time the narration is taking place. Often, the narrative line is haphazardly cut by sections about the life, the character, and the oeuvre of Bill Cosey dead long ago at the time the story takes place. In the evolution of the narrative, Morrison builds fantastic incidents in which Bill Cosey is perceived as a living character who interacts with others although we actually know he is dead and has not returned back as it is the case of *Beloved*. This interaction of realistic voices and unrealistic ones within a realistic setting introduces a new mode of an uncanny narration. This narrative process discloses the psychological dejection that Morrison feels to see blacks destroy themselves, hence obliterating the potential of the African American folk. This auto-destruction is principally revealed through the sworn enmity that divides Heed on one side against Christine and her mother May on the other side over the inheritance of Bill Cosey's possessions.

At the origin of the strife, there is a will that Bill Cosey wrote in order to clarify the process of inheritance of his wealth after his death. The will indeed attributes much

power of legacy to Cosey's lover and mistress Celestial. Since this will disinherits the real heirs by giving less advantage to Cosey's widow Heed, his granddaughter Christine and the daughter-in-law May, these women develop a feeling of hatred against themselves and Celestial. Christine, assisted by her mother May, concocts another will in which Heed is kept aside on the subject of ownership of Cosey's wealth (p.68). On the other side, Heed, backed by the senior cook L in Bill Cosey's estate, obtains also another forged will that partly excludes Christine and her mother. In the developments of the narrative, we meet a radical confrontation of these fake versions of the will intended by the antagonists, each seeking to win the legacy upon the destruction of the other. The original will that was written by Cosey himself while alive emerges in the narration but is kept at bay by the homodiegetic narrator and character L, who endeavors to rescue Heed from the rage of Christine and her mother

L took all the power in the house to save Heed in puzzled crossroads. Wills were falling from heavens. Christine would want to own the bequest and Heed seeking too to get a share. How could she get that share coveted by Christine and her mother at all cost? By love? by war? by contention? A new testament by L to protect Heed was born—replacing Heed at the center of the wealth (p.91).

In this novel, Morrison brings back a narration in which the past re-emerges in the present that results in agitation. The will that Bill Cosey drafted before his death to state how his wealth would be shared once dead is an embodiment of the past. Its re-emergence in the present lives of the women ignites tensions. Just as the reader of *Beloved* moves on within the conflicts between past and present, there is an equal sensation of pastness that makes irruption into present to disrupt the narration. This disruption that intervenes at textual level embodies the social disintegration of the women who have become three distant and distinct entities under same roof. Segments of this past occur at various moments of the narration, making the story hard to understand because its normal texture is deeply disorganised. This textual

disorganisation caused by the conflicting past and present fictionalises the disintegration of the African American community.

3.2.2 The disrupted multiple points of view in the process of narration

Morrison's fiction reposes on a narration that accommodates diverse points of view which intersperse at different moments in the story. There are many situations in which one event is described from different perspectives and in different instances. *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, *Sula* and *Love* adopt extensively this type of narration; their narrative axes reveal an existence of multi-voiced narrative structures deployed to (re)narrate generally the central issues that the novels address. In her interview with Mackay (1994), Morrison admits the presence and importance of this multi-voiced narration in her works that she considers 'evocative'

The fact is that the stories look as though they come from people who are not even authors. No author tells these stories. They are just told...meanderingly...as though they are going in several directions at the same time...I am not experiential, I am simply trying to recreate something out of an old art form in my books...something that defines what makes a book "black". And that has nothing to do with whether the people in the books are black or not. The open-ended quality that is sometimes a problematic in the novel form reminds me of the uses to which stories are put in the black community. The stories are constantly being told, constantly being imagined within a framework (p.13).

Morrison's statement about the versatility of narration highlights her choice to adhere to the style. She adopts a narrative style that inaugurates a new mode which redefines her work as "black" writing. In this multipoint narration, the writer imitates the traditional narrative structure of the African American folktales. Just like the historical blues and spirituals that typify the uniqueness of the African American individuality, Morrison holds that in her novels "stories are just told" and move "meanderingly". She recreates a new narrative perspective that is unique to herself and which redefines the African American community in its essence. The narrative

perspective in her works regards no rule; it breaks the existing patterns of points of view in narration by intermixing all the types of view in unrelated situations.

Jinping (2012) observes that “Morrison’s *Beloved* engages with the numerous ways...official and unofficial, central and decentralized, privileged and marginal—narrative functions in multicultural spaces” (p.4). In his exploration of the novel’s organisation with regard to the narrative point of view, the critic notes that the events which happened eighteen years ago are unlocked little by little through scenes of painful memories of the horrors that the protagonist and other characters experienced. The narration touches all the characters, giving everyone an occasion to share with the reader the perception of events. These events are not described successively as they are generally disrupted by an omniscient narrator to connect the broken line of the narration. *Beloved*’s important instances such as Sethe’s hard labor in Sweet Home, her escape, her scarred back with a chokecherry tree, her abuse by schoolteacher, Denver’s birth and beyond all the most upsetting infanticide appear in a disorganised way with narrators who relate events, each taking their position independently of the other.

Basically, the multiple points of view initiate important turning points in the narration process. From the beginning of the novel to the middle, the reader has a vague idea of what has actually happened to Sethe and why she attempted to kill her offspring. Some instances re-occur in the story many times but the narrations are performed by different narrators and left incomplete in many respects. For instance, the description of Sethe’s murder occurs ten times in the story. This central event of the novel is mainly told from five perspectives: an omniscient narrator, Baby Suggs, Stamp Paid, schoolteacher and Sethe herself. Sethe’s crime is first told by an omniscient narrator

who superficially gives first hand information to the reader. The narrator does not develop the story to provide a comprehensive account. In the developments of the narrative, the same event is retold by Stamp Paid to Paul D. In this first to second-person narration, the conversation between the two characters lays down significant details that enlighten the reader to understand more the motives behind Sethe's murder

“Sethe beat Cincinnati almost dead...very tired. I assisted her to cross Ohio river exhausted.”

“With what destination?”

“Paul, why asking a silly word like that!!!Her progeny was lying with grandma Baby Suggs some days before. She was trying to join them and get freed of the Kentucky dark. She found me an angel. Her swelling feet were shedding. To direct her from the river to Grandma was my work to her and her nursing baby Denver.”

“Oh poor Sethe; she was seeking life away from Sweet Home.”

“Once arrived, life was happy with Baby Suggs, her sons Burglar and Howard including her daughter baby who, all of them, were staying with Grandma.”

“But now what happened to Sethe? She is delirious too thoughtful!!! Almost suspecting everything. She told me of a ghost haunting her house 124 but I failed to know.”

“Twenty eight days in 124, life turned back. Scaring, scaring and nearly dead. Sethe saw schoolteacher in the compound of 124 coming from nowhere. Failing to accept his presence, she quickly saw slavery again that she couldn't bear. She decided to seclude her progeny from the wicked sight of schoolteacher and his team. She took them to the house and started to kill them all...but succeeded to saw to death her two-year daughter.”

“That really happened, Stamp Paid, my friend?”

“Yes, indeed. She was after taken to prison with the nursing Denver; and schoolteacher went back alone with his company.”

“After, the ghost of the killed baby showed up. That's the war she is fighting now.”

“Poor Sethe, Poor Sethe...” (pp.157-158).

This long conversation between Stamp Paid and Paul D over Sethe's past uncovers the hidden facts that Sethe herself did not like to reveal to Paul D when he arrived in her home. From this conversation, the reader now understands that it was the unexpected intrusion of schoolteacher into Sethe's compound that made her ego disturbed. The invasion by her former slaveholder into Baby Suggs's home where

Sethe and her children are living now peacefully reminds her of the unspeakable horrors she experienced for years while a slave. From Stamp Paid's revelations to Paul D, the reader comes to know why Sethe reacted so violently as her ego was brutally offended again. In the next moment, the murder is narrated by Sethe herself to Paul D in a form of remorse. Being the author of the crime, she tries to motivate her choice to Paul D who listens to her with trepidation, "You've got two legs, Sethe, not four;" signifying that she is not an animal; that she should have behaved like human beings despite the rigidity of the circumstance (*Beloved*, p.162). Sethe does not give any detailed account which would provide the reader enough light as Stamp Paid did. Indeed, she feels lessened and compromised by feelings of guilt that restrict her ego to talk much over the matter.

Although these narrations move around one common event, that is, Sethe's crime, each narrator adopts a perspective that is unique to them. The narration moves from an omniscient point of view to first and second-person perspectives crosscutting the observations of each narrator. To some extent, this crosscutting effect blurs the appropriate interpretation of the text for the reader. The latter is left with fragments of the event—fragments that need a certain ability to reconstruct the story for a better understanding. This disruption of the narrative chain initiates an "open-ended quality" that Morrison evokes to be "problematic" in reference to the reception of the text. Ultimately, the omniscient narrator's position does not allow the audience to know everything; yet every bit of the information he narrates empowers the reader's entry into a discovery of another reality which is awfully repellent.

The perception of the same horrid event equally changes from one point to another. While Sethe, in a first-person narration, confesses that she wanted to kill her children

out of love to “protect” them against the afflictions of slavery (p.187), schoolteacher has a different observation. His declarations in a third-person narration rebuff Sethe’s assertion of the good intentions for a ‘relieving’ crime she committed. For the slave-owner schoolteacher, Sethe’s choice to take life of her progeny is a “testimony to the result of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred” (p.151). Schoolteacher’s view point describes Sethe as a woman suffering from cannibalism. For the bigot white master, it is her cannibalistic instincts that drive Sethe to commit the murder. His excessive hatred and malice against slaves cannot allow him to make right judgment and understand the pain he inflicts on them everyday and the subsequent psychological trauma they go through. This third-person narration of schoolteacher’s sadistic perspective prejudices Sethe’s first-person narration of her magnanimous self. In her struggle and conviction to “protect” her children, Sethe demonstrates victory over schoolteacher. In Propp’s narratological function, “the villain is defeated” (ibid. p.67). Sethe beats her enemy. In fact, schoolteacher has come to 124 to take Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home to endure a slave life. But upon her committed heroism, she kicks him away; Sethe’s master goes back empty-handed and humiliated with the whole posse. Although she loses her baby during the tussle and consequently goes to prison, she significantly succeeds to defy schoolteacher identified as a villain in Propp’s description and whose aim was to bring the woman and her children into bondage again. Morrison deploys an intricate narrative construction that unsettles the normal order of narration to create an emotional effect in the reader’s mind. The reader feels empathetic with the black characters in every traumatic experience they face.

Love gives another form of multipoint narration. While adopting the metaphor of love in this love-and-hate novel, Morrison introduces another side of narrative technique. In addition to the nonlinear third-person stream-of-consciousness that dominates the narration process of the novel, *Love* also shows an underscored first-person narration of five soliloquies performed by the narrator-character significantly named L. In the internal structure of the narrative, L's italicised narration opens the Cosey saga; the rest of the four soliloquies are randomly interposed at the end of Chapter three, four, six and nine. Technically, these ending soliloquies come to end a chapter story that has started and progressed in a different narration.

At the core of the novel, a third-person narrator gives an account of the 1971 quarrel shortly before Bill Cosey's burial. The conflict opposes the three 'Cosey women'—Heed, May and Christine—who argue, before a lawyer, over the one who “has a unique claim on Cosey's affection” (p.98). To resolve the matter clearly, they want to know the one who “has either ‘saved’ him from some disaster or relieved him of an impending one” (p.98). During Bill's burial, with her discretion and wisdom of a devoted woman, the narrator and hotel cook L intercepts a fight between Heed and Christine with only a whispered short statement, “I'll tell” (p.98). L's warning to “tell”—to unveil the intimate secret of the quarrelling women—brings back order. Both women cool down as they know that “nothing L said ever was idle” (p.98). But, with this brief narrative warning “I'll tell”, what does the homodiegetic narrator L really intend to reveal which would discredit Heed and Christine on one side, and Heed and May on the other? Although not explicitly revealed in the evolution of the narrative, for the reader and listener, narrator L's threat to *tell* “not only creates narrative tension but also textual ambiguity” (Ho, 2006, p. 655). The reverse in the

narration changes the state of affairs by bringing together the rivals to hold back their dispute.

The narrative interposition of narrator-character L operates as a ruling that has to umpire over the flaws committed by the three women. At some time, her narration mitigates the tensions of the rivalry between characters in complex situations. She brings order between Heed and Christine when their long and historical girlhood and friendship is broken. Besides, L's irruption in the inheritance saga over Bill Cosey's left possessions saves the three women against the intended biased will which was granting everything to Bill's mistress, Celestial. L decides to destroy the will and then forges a new text which dispossesses neither woman as heir to Bill's bequest although that will does not consider the inheritors equal (p.82). At least it prevents all the 'Cosey women' from an absolute deprivation that would bring them into a state of homelessness and beggary. Out of pity that she feels toward the despised women, narrator-character L poisons Bill Cosey with foxglove; and he subsequently dies (p.109). L's killing of Bill Cosey initiates a *mediation* process that saves the women from absolute dispossession. Propp's *mediation* enables L, who acts as a heroine, to sense the "misfortune or lack that is made known" (Propp, *ibid.* p.53) and which has been caused by Cosey himself to ruin his own family. She "uncovers the deceit, discovers the lacking and learns of the villainous acts" (Propp, *ibid.* p.54) that would discredit the women; she finally decides to act. L's intervention to assassinate Cosey serves as *mediation* between him and the women. The deliberate murder establishes the women in their rights as heirs despite the irregularities of L's new concocted will. Although this text does not end totally the existing strife between the pretenders, it resolves the matter by seeking a way that saves the women who were entrapped by Bill Cosey's licentious character. She counteracts the unfair behaviour of the villain—

understood here as Bill Cosey—and succeeds to free the captives upon her bravery despite the simple position of cook that she holds in the Cosey mansion.

In short, Morrison's use of a multi-voiced narration plays a great role in the meaning of a story. Her art of representing an event to be retold from various perspectives provides her characters with a possibility to reveal their frustrations and the possible strategies to sort out the challenges they encounter. Upon this aesthetic deployment of a multi-voiced narration, Morrison creates a new mode of narrative technique that breaks the tradition of linear narrative structure to represent the hardships of the African American existence in its different aspects.

3.2.3 Ambiguity in narration

While discussing the effects of disruption in the narrative process of Morrison's horror fiction, it appears important to analyse the dimension of ambiguity and its implication to the world of the text. Morrison deploys a language that purposely conveys several meanings to some events dealt by the novels. This phenomenon places the reader into a state of plurality in meaning—a situation that generates confusion to identify the appropriate message the writer wants her audience to acquire. Usually, in magical realism and horror fiction, writers adopt a style that does not provide a clear-cut story. They deliberately write stories whose meanings hang between two spaces: the metaphorical and the literal. The narrator performs his task of storytelling in a way that encourages the reader to take part in it. Morrison's *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Love* and *Beloved* are novels of such a kind. These works attest the writer's genius in that the techniques she applies in the construction of the narratives bring about stories of multiple ambiguities which, however, have a certain correlation with regard to the world of horror.

An outstanding case of Morrison's textual ambiguity consists in Beloved's identity which has got numerous interpretations. House (1990) holds that Beloved is a slave woman who has been struggling under the austere heat of the horrors of slavery and now has got an aperture to escape the cruel treatment of her master (p.20). On the basis of the novel's numerous indications like "a young woman who has herself suffered the horrors of slavery" (*Beloved*, p.17), critic House rejects the hypothesis of ghostly reincarnation of Sethe's slain baby. Morrison's writing of "all the ancestors lost in the Diaspora, demanding restoration to a temporal continuum" (*Beloved*, p.199) prompts Lessee (2014) to explore Beloved as "a purely natural and living woman devoid of any paranormal quality" (p.117). Her exploration gives Beloved a human identity at equal consideration with her sister Denver and her brothers Howard and Burglar. Burke (2008), however, writes that Beloved was a fugitive woman who disappeared from the sight of her traders at a slave market while she was put on sale (p.67). Burns (2015) supports Lessee's assertion that Beloved is a "veritable human among humans" and "an actual survivor of the Middle Passage who gravely suffers from loneliness" as she finds herself alone on a land where she knows none. Burns mentions that Beloved, in her uncompromising humanity, "is a human looking for human company that would accommodate her as a human being and get back moral comfort" (p.62).

Although these critics perceive Beloved in every aspect as a human being, other scholars examine the nature and personality of Beloved and ascertain that she is Sethe's murdered baby who has returned back in form of a ghost to claim justice against the crime she suffered eighteen years ago. While reading the novel's excerpt which describes Beloved as a "ghost within the test..." (*Beloved*, p.41), Jones (2009) observes that the supernatural identity of Beloved is "unquestionable regarding her

mysterious homecoming and the eerie reactions she poses in 124” (p.34). This view is also espoused by Heinze (2010) who holds that *Beloved* is “Morrison’s most unambiguous endorsement of the supernatural” (p.9), “a memory” that “comes to life” and a personification of “Sethe’s alter-ego” (*Beloved*, p.207). Harris (2009) and Schopp (1997) read respectively *Beloved* as “the nature of spirit” (p.37) and a “prime example of the supernatural unspeakable being spoken” (p.48). These observations reiterate the supranormal nature of *Beloved* that renders her identity ambiguous.

What is evident for readers is that the novel’s “*Beloved*” as a character undergoes various critical interpretations. Morrison’s imagination of this character initiates a state of bewilderment that attests to the writer’s ability to create situations and characters that reflect the fragility of blacks caused by slavery. This fragility is manifested through the lack of stability and definition of their identity. *Beloved*’s fluid identity is an exemplification of such vulnerability. Ultimately, *Beloved* is too difficult to define in a single and inclusive term. According to Jinping (2012), “she is a reincarnation of Sethe’s dead daughter, a spirit of the past, a memory, a young woman who has endured slavery,” and a representation of “all the ancestors lost in a slave ship”. Besides, Jinping maintains that “*Beloved* means death, memory, forgiveness, and punishment to Sethe, a new life for Denver and a consolidation with the community” (p.6). Whatever interpretation given to *Beloved*, this character significantly embodies both the past and the present, the sufferings, the frustrations, the psychological trauma and alienation inflicted on the black race during slavery and the racialised times that epitomised the black history in America.

The uncanny representations based on the supernatural aspect that Morrison traces through this character and even in the other novels can be understood in this way.

Beloved's mysterious memory about the Middle Passage she never experienced is an exemplification of Morrison's attachment to the importance of history in the definition and understanding of a people in all its cultural, moral and social existence. The ambiguity in Beloved's identification shows that all the efforts to establish her signification fail. Her identity reveals that a lot of interpretations are possible; Denver herself signifies that Beloved is "more" after a deep observation of Beloved's conduct and demands in 124 (p.266). The identity of Beloved "defies all binary definitions and categorizations. She is neither absolutely evil nor definitely good. Beloved is both a monster to destroy Sethe and a life-giver who provides a chance for Sethe to have a future" (Jinping, 2012, p.6). This ambiguous identity generates ramifications in meaning that open up the writer's new revelations about the complexity of the human condition of the African American.

In an interview with Darling (1998) on the subject of Beloved's ambiguous identity, Morrison herself confirmed the equivocal nature of the character-ghost

She is a spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. And she must function like that in the text. She is also another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship. She speaks the language, a traumatized language, of her own experience, which blends beautifully with her questions and answers, her preoccupations, with the desires of Denver and Sethe. So that when they say 'What was it like over there?'...What was it like being dead? She tells them what it was like being when she was on that ship as a child. Both things are possible, and there's evidence in the text so that both things could be approached, because the language of both experience...death and the Middle Passage—is the same (p.43).

No matter what she may be, Beloved's roles and identity should be interpreted within metaphorical space. That she is a reincarnation of Sethe's dead daughter, or Sethe's mother or even a representation of the sexually abused women on the slave ship does not remove the veil laid over her identity. Regardless of what she represents within her ambivalent identity of ghost or real woman, Beloved is an epitome of the past

which never goes away; it remains and casts its repercussions to haunt the present. The narrative structure of the text requires readers to reflect systematically on these ambiguities in order to attempt more interpretations of the writer's intentions. Throughout the novel, the writer deliberately adopts a radical position that seeks to decry the horrible actions which undermine black existence in America. Morrison directs strongly her blame against the dehumanising racism which, in fact, creates these ambiguities within a multiracial community.

Ambiguity, in the narrative structure of Morrison's horror fiction, is also an important feature of *Song of Solomon*. This novel nails down a rich variety of themes that unfold through the evolution of the different stages of the narrative. It is difficult to figure out the central concern the writer focuses on in this novel; even though the plot highlights many current issues including racism, womanhood, poverty and revenge, there is an important focus on the socio-cultural concerns, among them egocentricity, ancestry and rootedness, and the values of cultural heritage. At the onset of the novel, the reader is presented with an unpleasantly pinching event that he would not expect: suicide. This event brings the reader to realise how much racial discrimination alienates black existence in America. The narration continues in a contrasted organisation: there is a birth of Milkman Dead (the protagonist) that occurs while the community is mourning the death of Robert Smith who has just committed suicide (p.8).

When Milkman Dead grows and becomes mature, his main obsession is to gain wealth that he thinks it will raise him to a higher social esteem. Overwhelmed by his father's mockery, Milkman is infuriated to find himself under his father's management; he wants to break the father's scorn and family exploitation, starting by

getting financial independence. In his dreams to acquire wealth by all means, he befriends Guitar Bains to assist him. They concoct robbery of Pilate's house and Milkman takes the lead in the scheme

“Guitar, don't you see we need human recognition above all?”

“Do you mean an action toward the dominating white Mississippi which martyrs blacks? Every day?”

“Mississippi was Mississippi and is what it is even now; maybe not tomorrow. We want life disjointed, disjointed of our elders, our parents. Dad needs to go away of me.”

“You mean?????”

“I target independent living and you too concerned; need your help. Aunt has a sack full of gold. Dad told me. Let's get it and do away with conformity”

“Right Milk...And the funds for my Seven Days will be there to restore lost esteem” (p.247).

Unfortunately, after robbery, the boys do not find the gold they believed Pilate might possess. Inside the bag there is a skeleton of Pilate's dead father, Macon Dead (p.114). After the boys' disappointment, the reader meets Milkman Dead on the way to Pennsylvania still running after the gold that he thinks it might be hidden in a cave there according to his father's new revelations. But in the end, Morrison propels the protagonist, Milkman Dead, to Virginia. There, he is no longer obsessed with gold: his frail personality grows to maturity that leads him to engage in a deep search for the origins of his ancestry in order to identify his socio-cultural and historical roots. Milkman's shift from gold (wealth) to family roots (ancestry) creates an ambivalent state in his determination to attain the socio-economic independence. Beside this ambiguity of self-recognition, Milkman Dead is the object of passionate love and cause of the demise of his cousin and lover Hagar that he first loved so delightedly to despise her later too bitterly without reason (p.131).

From the beginning till the end, it is unclear to identify the prime role Morrison assigns to Milkman as a protagonist. The reader identifies Milkman performing

different tasks of almost equal intensity; it is difficult to establish the central action that would be supposed to hold grand emphasis and which would qualify Milkman as a true protagonist. In many situations, he appears both as a hero and as a villain in Propp's narratological terms (p. 57). His controversial character as a protagonist prejudices the duties to which he is assigned and the relations he has to entertain with other characters. The mixing-up of unconnected tasks engenders an amalgamation that blurs Morrison's audience to know what she really wants them to learn about the protagonist. In some cases, we saw that Milkman is portrayed committing robbery at his aunt Pilate's home—an act that discredits his position as a hero. At this point, he is a confirmed villain. In other scenes, Morrison represents the same protagonist grieving over the same Aunt now shot dead by Guitar Bains. Indeed, while Milkman is assisting aunt Pilate to bury the relics of her father Macon Dead, Guitar schemes to kill him as he accuses Milkman to have cheated him over the gold found in Pennsylvania. The bullet intended for Milkman accidentally hits Pilate to death (pp.339-340). At this time, Milkman transmutes into a hero who struggles at the hand of Guitar identified as a villain who seeks to ruin the life of the hero.

Though the narrative ends encouragingly portraying Milkman as a hero, the largest part of *Song of Solomon's* plot presents the protagonist as a villain marked of numerous flaws. It appears challenging to establish the nature and the personality Milkman is endowed with as they keep changing from time to time and from place to place. This ambiguous nature and the versatility in functions of the protagonist impair his active capacity as a leading character.

In short, ambiguity in Morrison's narratives is a technique that the writer applies to represent generally the dilemma which haunts the main characters. Lost into a

convoluted world, characters and the acts they pose are not relatively connected. By utilising ambiguity as a mode of narration to disrupt the novel's plot, Morrison wants to portray the anxieties, the fears of alienation and the disrupted and unsettled existence that characterise the African American community in a multi-culturally exploitative society. The racialisation of the society, the gender-biased consciousness and the socio-economic inequalities agitate Morrison who questions the present and the potential of America.

3.3 Disrupting a Narrative by Characters' Performativity

The complexity of Morrison's writing touches profoundly the organisational structure of the narration at both textual level and at characters' actions level as well. The actions of Morrison's characters can be categorised into two groups: physical or 'performative' actions and mental or 'emotive' actions. Performative actions imply a *physical* effort or participation that characters engage in the execution of their tasks. This section looks at how the performative actions of characters affect the narrative process by breaking up its logical structure and thereby producing a partial loss in meaning.

Beloved provides an outstanding case of performative disruption in the evolution of the narrative. In the previous sections of this Chapter, we have seen that when schoolteacher and the sheriff make irruption into 124, Sethe quickly snatches her children back to a secluded room (p.67). She falls heartbroken to see schoolteacher again. She gets a pain that makes her resentful at the unexpected visit of people who reduced her existence to a state of commodity. Sethe lives with her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs and her four children. She also lives amid a community of fellow black neighbours. At the sight of her former master schoolteacher, she gets a premonition

that something terrible is coming right before the intruders even state the reason of their visit. While neighbours expect Sethe to have gripped her children back to the house in order to assure them safety against an eventual harm, she rather takes a saw and starts cutting their throats deliberately (p.157). She is interrupted when she has already “sawed” fatally her third child-daughter whom the narrative attributes two circumstantial names: ‘Beloved’ and ‘crawling already? girl’. The other children are left seriously wounded.

At structural ground, the normal evolution of the narration is interrupted by Sethe’s action: a murder is committed by Sethe herself when neighbours are expecting her to keep the children away from the malice of schoolteacher and his cohort. The murder counteracts the wishes of the community which could not expect Sethe to be so unemotional. From a twenty-eight-day atmosphere of serenity and peace, the narration veers to darkness which breaks the trust the community had in Sethe. Burrows (2004) holds that the infanticide Sethe commits is “a reaffirmation of an excessive maternal love Sethe bears towards her children” (p.25). However, Sethe’s violent reaction raises multiple questions: is it really an act of redemption as she herself pleads or a crime she commits?

Sethe knows much about the horrors of a slave life and particularly the pain of being a woman slave. In addition to her individual traumatic experiences, she learned how “her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew,” sexually abused while on the Middle Passage ship (*Beloved*, p.62). Sethe also recalls how her mother was innocently hanged only because of her black colour. Sethe cannot stand anything that would bring back herself or her children into slavery that she knew its dehumanising nature. Importantly, while attempting to kill the

children, she starts by her daughter, insinuating that her psyche as a woman has been so dreadfully scarred that she cannot let her daughter suffer the same calvary. Although the Cincinnati neighbours perceive the murder she commits as a crime, Sethe, in her conviction, wants to “protect” —to spare—her children from the painful experiences she has endured for years (p.189).

By introducing an abrupt discrepancy in the narration, Morrison shapes the character of Sethe into a brave woman to launch a revolution against discrimination through committed resistance. Alone, Sethe engages a war against four men who have come to ruin her newly acquired freedom. As we saw earlier, neither Sethe nor her children are retaken back to a slave life at the hand of the tyrannical master. She explicitly rejects submission and an endless alienation that have petrified her self. In Sethe’s struggle, Morrison breaks the prejudiced socio-cultural consciousness of woman’s weakness, passivity and incapacity to act for social change. Morrison’s mode of disruption in the narration reverses the expectations of the reader. The abject psyche of Sethe and the uncanny reaction she manifests in assailing her children have nothing to do with the “animosity” and “cannibalism” that schoolteacher blames her to incarnate. In addition, Sethe is confident that in death there is freedom that heals the wounds caused by human wickedness. Thus the narrative breakage in performative actions enacts the character’s commitment to resistance to bring about change; it establishes optimism and possibility to emerge and undertake new visions to achieve an undeniable socio-cultural recognition.

The narrative structure of *Song of Solomon* develops also uncanny performative instances that unsettle the logical structure of the narration. After Macon Jr. has told his son Milkman Dead that Pilate (sister to Macon Jr. and aunt to Milkman) has gold

in her house, Milkman goes to meet his friend Guitar Bains. They scheme a robbery of that gold believed to be kept in a sack suspended from the ceiling of Pilate's house. Eventually, Milkman and Guitar succeed to steal the sack out of Pilate's sight (p.247). Surprisingly, when they open the sack to share the loot, they find no gold: there is a human skeleton and some rocks inside (p.249). This skeleton is part of the relics of old Macon Dead I, father to Macon Jr. and Pilate. At this juncture, Morrison introduces an important point of uncanny discontinuity in the narration that brings narrator and reader together to observe a deviation both in meaning and in the narration. Gold and skeleton are two diametrically opposed and distant entities that can never have a common point. Morrison deploys this metaphor to decry the growing capitalistic spirit that is destroying America.

Metaphorically, gold implies wealth while a skeleton personifies life or human existence, its fragility and its transient nature. There is a rift in meaning and in referents conveyed by these entities. Before we observe a hasty shift in the narration, the narrator informs the reader that Milkman is a money-obsessed young boy whose daily preoccupation is to grow richer in order to acquire enough power to challenge his ruthless father. Milkman's friend, Guitar Bains, needs money as well to fund the 'Seven Days' club, a secret organisation of black boys that avenges murdered blacks by killing whites (p.171). It is evident that these two characters have two opposite views before they undertake the journey to rob Pilate. Morrison's introduction of these binaries in the narration, i.e. 'gold-skeleton' and 'money/wealth-revenge' allegorises an existence of a corrupt black mindset that sabotages an inclusive vision to subvert the white cultural hegemony. Guitar pretends to love blacks; he even kills whites under the pretext of blacks' self-defense (p.145). Paradoxically, accompanied by Milkman, they abuse the elderly relative 'black' mother and Aunt Pilate who

shares with them the same pain of racial marginalisation. What is more poignant, in the end of the novel, it is the same Guitar who kills Pilate by shooting her to death while he is scheming to murder Milkman. The narrator recounts

...it seemed to Milkman that he heard the shot after she fell...“You hurt? You hurt, Pilate”? Milkman bent low to see her face...Not sweat, but blood oozing from her neck down into his cupped hand. He pressed his fingers against the skin as if to force the life back in her, back into the place it was escaping from. But that only made it flow faster...The blood was not pulsing out any longer and there was something black and bubbly in her mouth. Yet when she moved her head a little to gaze at something behind his shoulder, it took a while for him to realize that she was dead (pp. 339-340).

The uncanny images of skeleton and death coupled with an abrupt disarray in the narration of the novel depict the strange immorality that worsens the decaying human condition of the African American existence. It is this self-destruction which generates social disintegration that Morrison paints through a metaphorical narrative disruption of gold and skeleton. For the writer, beside the racial inequalities that shake the society in general, the African American is enemy of himself.

Morrison's narrative mode of performative disruption is multidimensional and multipurpose in function. While the technique is used in *Beloved* to remind the reader of the dangers of uprootedness and non-belongingness, this narrative tool is used in *Love* to focalise on the importance of the ethical values of justice, equity and faithfulness. Earlier, we saw how L decides to kill Bill Cosey after she has noticed the ill-mannered character of this corrupt parent who disowns his own progeny to the advantage of his mistress Celestial. She poisons him using a drink mixed with foxglove that Bill Cosey drinks and dies of later (p. 89). The narration is at this stage intercepted by L's murder: the reader's attention shifts to investigating L's motivations, her interest in Cosey's death, and the kind of relations she was entertaining with her manager. As a character, L is a senior and sincere cook in Bill

Cosey's Hotel and Resort. She has never had any issue with her employer and has no feeling of hatred against him. She has been working there for many years and knows much about the family secrets of the Cosey house. She is only upset to see that Bill Cosey has written a biased will that grants larger rights of inheritance to his sexual lover and mistress Celestial. Once dead, if the bill is enforced, L observes that Bill's widow Heed, his daughter-in-law May and his granddaughter Christine will be condemned to a state of deprivation. L decides to assassinate Bill Cosey and destroy the will in order to restore justice to the despised women who are supposed to be the legal inheritors. Morrison creates the character of L as a redeemer. In the instigation of death, L does not act as a villain. Embarrassed by the eventual expropriation the women are facing, the homodiegetic narrator L demonstrates her prowess as a hero: she rescues the women from the abyss dug by Cosey. She spares them from the betrayal they would run if ever Cosey's will were to be enforced. The deliberate assassination of Bill Cosey that she voluntarily instigates, initiates a salvation of his family. Morrison weaves a disrupted narrative in which death intervenes to reestablish justice and equity. L poisons Bill Cosey with foxglove. Foxglove is a medicinal plant from which the drug digitalis is extracted. It is used as a stimulant in the treatment of heart ailments. Morrison applies this metaphor of foxglove to point out the importance of death in the reestablishment of social order, justice and equity for an effective reconstruction of family and society.

3.4 The Narrative Technique of Defragmentation and the Process of Rebirth

So far, we have discussed how Morrison's narrative technique of disruption, employed in its various forms, suggests the fragmentation of the American society with a particular emphasis on the destruction of the African American existence. The aesthetic paradigm of the jumbled up usages of the past and present in the narrations

of several unrelated events has been one of the great examples that attest to the writer's affirmation of an existence of such a social and cultural disintegration. Parallel to the fragmented structure of her narratives, Morrison adopts another narrative strategy to represent the hopes for social healing. The writer discontinues the narration with some metaphorical motifs, symbols and literary devices that introduce a new feeling of regeneration. This section discusses this narrative process under the concept of "aesthetics of defragmentation". It examines how Morrison puts into play this technique to suggest a possibility for social rebirth.

Bell (2004) analyses the literary achievements of black novelists of America and points out that the "formal and thematic defragmentation in African American literature is a key-factor that seems to unite various tendencies that this literature raises" (p.49). The narrative technique of defragmentation labelled in this study as "aesthetics of defragmentation" is present in Morrison's horror fiction. It alleviates the gravity of the pain by creating a soothing atmosphere that serves to appease the psychological tension generated by the horrifying experiences that characters surmount.

Sula is a representative novel that bears out the writer's use of this narrative mode of defragmentation. The plotline of this novel brings narrator and reader together to "attempt to tie the loose cords" of the story in the same way Shadrack "laced and silent in his small bed...tried to tie the loose cords in his mind" (p.10). On the basis of structure, *Sula* is a complex and unruly novel. At surface, the plot is organised into a chronological sequence of chapters whose titles correspond to significantly selected years of black history. Yet, this chronology is broken intermittently; it gradually disappears as the story moves on with intricate events and situations. The motif of

death recurs, however, throughout the storyline of the novel bearing both literal and figurative significance. This motif of death constitutes the novel's important point.

From the prologue, the narrative develops salient instances that have a correlation with the years suggested as chapters' titles. This development follows a specific pattern that mirrors the different stages of the cycles of life: birth, growth and death. In addition to these stages, Morrison adds an extra-stage that is not generally common: rebirth. Just like the mythological Egyptian phoenix, the representation of the motif of death reveals two layers—death and rebirth—that mix up at different levels. The case of Shadrack, one of the main characters, is very significant. While he proclaims the National Suicide Day which would come to “order and focus experience” (p.10), the recurring scenes of distressful deaths often come on one side to break solace that was prevailing to the other side to reestablish the troubled order in the community. The death of Sula, for instance, is welcomed as a positive circumstance in the Bottom as she was considered a veritable threat that was bringing chaos to the black community. Parallel to the pervasive motif of death, the narration also brings other motifs that galvanise the structure and meaning of the text. These motifs are water, fire, air and earth that suggest the utility of the four natural elements in the construction of the narrative. They work jointly with the motif of ‘death’ to enact the grimness of the living conditions of the Bottom through a fragmented representation.

In the second chapter entitled “1920”, while Nel is with her mother Helen on a trip to the South in a train, they are frustrated to find that there are no toilets for black passengers. The available toilets are solely reserved to whites in a cosmopolitan train that boards both the whites and the coloured. This segregation infuriates Nel who later

urinates in her stockings as she is pressed by the calling of nature. Humiliated, they are forced to go and release themselves outside where they use leaves of grass in lieu of toilet paper. The narrator reports the dilemma Nel and her mother experience

All relaxing spaces on the train were very-very free. Nobody was in. There was an inscription on each entry, "No colored, no black, no black." Nel felt uneasy—finding nowhere to retreat. She went from place to place but couldn't get one...Helen would keep her silence saying no word but under pain. Finally, the resistance weakened: the sad daughter covered with urine through and along her stockings felt ashamed and sat half dead...Quickly mother and daughter ran outside the coach as it got to a new station. A small bush assisted the woman and her daughter with some leaves of the poor trees (p.42).

While asleep, Nel mulls over her memories, the temporal as well as spatial fragments of her experiences; she starts to focus on parts of her body that she finds disconnected since her physical body no longer communicates with her inner self. In the most horrific recollections, she remembers the painful sight of the dead body of her great-grandmother Cecile. In this process of rememory, all the four natural elements that inform the cycle of life are present: air appears in the form of smell that oozes from her grandmother Rochelle's applied perfume on her body (p.71); fire can be seen from the burning fireplace in the house (p.62); earth is easily identified in the form of dust; and finally water is connected with Nel's urine in her stockings (p.42). Her trip has been very dreadful: the awkward faces of the white soldiers on the train focalising on her, the all-white streets she travelled through, the lack of dialogue with other passengers...made her fearful. At home, when the trip is over, Nel ponders on her past journey: the shocking experiences she faced have fortified her; and she has developed a new sense of self. She reflects on the last humiliations she went through with her mother Helen and suddenly shouts, "I am me." She reiterates, "Me." (p.47)

This self-assuring declaration of her being empowers Nel and transforms the young girl into a complete settled woman different from the person she incarnated while

travelling to the South. She has discovered that she lacks nothing to be considered a full magnificent girl at the same level of the white girls of her neighborhood Medallion. The past fragmented self that made her paranoid is gone; Nel has now acquired a new strength that makes her feel proud of herself and morally comfortable. This time, she feels that she fits the place she is in. Her fears of white domination, her fragmented memories and her distorted visions of lower status are gone. She has defied all the socio-cultural barriers imposed by the Other to depersonalise her humanity. Nel's tragic experiences have empowered her to detect the hidden evil side of the whites from the villainous wickedness they perpetrate over her mother and herself. This discovery enacts again Propp's *mediation* function that uncovers the villain's malice in a manner to counteract his scheme and therefore prepare a way to the hero's victory. In Propp's view, "If a young girl or boy is seized or driven out, and the thread of the narrative is linked to his or her fate and not to those who remain behind, then the hero of the tale is the seized or banished boy or girl" (ibid. p.49). With the discovery of the completeness of her body, the "misfortune or lack is made known" (ibid p.49). In this way, Nel defeats the white opponents and becomes a heroine. She has destroyed the walls of seclusion as she undertakes a journey toward self-discovery. Defragmentation occurs at this stage. From an ignored perception of her own individuality, Nel ascends to a stage of self-consideration. From a subhuman individuality that she thought she incarnated, she has acquired a new identity that positions her in the right place as a complete human being. The inferiority she believed that her being embodied is gone. She is as competent and powerful as the white girls of her age. She is confident in her self and nobody has the right either to define her individuality or to pass judgment over her inclusive belongingness as a black individual.

The feeling of “Me” that Morrison introduces in the narrative patches the fragmented identities of Nel and her mother, Helen. This feeling initiates recreation and rebirth that fasten together the fragmented pieces of their selves through the process of defragmentation. From now on, Nel knows that *she is herself*, “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me. Me” (*Sula*, p.49). Whenever she utters the word “me”, there is an intensity produced that brings the reader to feel sympathetic with Nel. To safeguard the acquired defragmented self, she goes beyond to deny being called ‘Nel’ again, “I’m not Nel,” because she is certain this name is a result of alienation from the Other. She has acquired the name as an attribution from the community. That is why it cannot define her existence. The only name and qualification she accepts to bear is “me”, “I’m me. Me,” which in fact, keeps her honor and dignity guaranteed.

Morrison’s aesthetics of defragmentation functions like a process of healing. After she has endured a rude experience during the trip to the South, Nel is now a refined individual. She sleeps one evening and wakes up the next morning reborn. In this rebirth, Morrison creates a metaphor that touches both the oppressor and the oppressed. She provides a vital encouragement to the African American people that the horrors of alienation are fleeting away and consequently subject to defeat. In the same way, the writer gives a message to the hegemonic white community that society is always dynamic through time; as a result one should nurture the seeds of humanhood that would uplift society in its holistic grandeur. The process of defragmentation occurs after characters have experienced severe damages either physically, morally or psychologically. It therefore works as a response to soothe the broken hearts and heal the wounds caused by alienation.

Christian (1980) and Reddy (1988) observe that the most important event developed in each chapter of *Sula* deals with a literal or metaphorical death. These deaths are different in nature. The two most significant deaths across the novel are the death of Sula and the massive death of the demonstrators against job exclusion in the construction of the River Road. Both these characters die literal deaths which have different meanings and implications. Importantly, it is essential to note that the death of the demonstrators is not a sign of defeat: they are regarded as heroes in their denial to condemn and ridicule publicly the discriminatory nature of the whites of Medallion.

Before he dies along the demonstrators, Shadrack lives a troubled life due to the traumatic experiences he accumulated in World War One. Having been affected by the tragic deaths of the War and particularly the death of his friend-soldier who was ruthlessly decapitated, Shadrack institutes a National Suicide Day that is celebrated every third of January. The establishment and the celebration of this Day is an event that runs across the entire story of the novel. In the beginning, the commemoration is very cold: only does Shadrack descend in the streets and demonstrate alone. But through time, other members of the black community of the Bottom join the Day.

Significantly, the third of January 1938 was the day when the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt inaugurated the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. It was a national organisation against Poliomyelitis, a disease of which the President himself fell victim. Similarly, Shadrack falls victim of the disease of racism which is atomising his community. In the same way President Roosevelt found an alternative solution to the then threatening disease of Polio for the American citizens, so does Shadrack institute the National Suicide Day to end the traumatic alienation that the

black community of the Bottom is enduring. For Shadrack, suicide (death) does not entail loss of life; it rather grants freedom that one has been denied by the white community of Medallion. Now that his historically cultural village of the Bottom is going to be completely demolished in order to build a golf course for the wealthy whites, the only escape left to him is to take refuge in death rather than live wretchedly and permanently under the absolute contempt and exploitation of these whites. Morrison creates the character of Shadrack hailing suicide as a defragmenter which would end the pain of racial marginalisation that his community is experiencing.

In 1940, shortly before the massive death in the tunnel, Sula dies. By this time, she had become a social misfit in the whole black community. In fact, her presence in the village had brought ruin and a curse. Sula destroyed the household of her childhood friend Nel by eloping with Nel's husband Jude Greene after they were caught fornicating. She is notoriously known to be promiscuous: she indulges in sleeping with both black and white partners. This situation is considered an abomination for the black community of the Bottom to which Sula herself belongs. In the eyes of the neighbourhood, Sula is a devil (pp.113-117). After her death, although the community experiences a hard period of devastating robins that accompany her disappearance, people start feeling connected. They feel liberated and begin to rehabilitate what was literally and morally damaged by her presence. They "began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst" (pp.117-118). The demise of Sula *liquidates* the contention that was dividing blacks among themselves. As Propp indicates, some "misfortunes are resolved" and the community recover social cohesion that had been broken away by her presence (p.55). Sula's death functions as a defragmenter that

fastens the atomised community: the broken brotherhood, the profanation of social values and customs, and the loss of a holistic vision of a future for the blacks that had been sacked by Sula's presence are now restored. In her death there is rebirth of the society. The black community of the Bottom regains the social reputation it used to enjoy before Sula went loose and brought a curse over it. This social defragmentation (rebirth) prompted by Sula's death is a result of an antithetical effect: the death of an individual sets a foundation to set upright what has already collapsed and fortify what is still faltering.

Interestingly, Sula's death carries more significance than her life. In addition to the stability and mutual collaboration that have returned upon her death, even Sula herself is pleased with her death; it occurs before she becomes helpless and dependent to beg those who would not care for her. For this reason, she welcomes death with great admiration. She is confident that she has lived a life which did not compromise her personality among the black community of the Bottom. By the time she feels her physical body disintegrating, she gets happy to die a dignified woman with the necessary esteem despite the societal hatred and disgrace cast over her person. She fearlessly reveals this pleasure in death to Nel while visiting her on the deathbed

“You think I don't know what your life is like just because I ain't living it? I know what every colored woman in this country is doing.”

“What's that?”

“Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world” (p.143).

In her narrative structure, Morrison adopts a symbolic language to represent the narrative process of defragmentation of Sula through death. The similes of “stump” and “redwoods” in the passage above are very suggestive. Once a tree has been cut down, what is left is known as a *stump*. It starts drying and later rots. It becomes a

leftover in the form of trash or trivia. The metaphor of *stump* suggests the abandonment, the despisedness, and the devalorisation of the black woman caused by a lack of social and legitimate status she would deserve. A stump has no value once the trunk has been taken away. From Sula's perspective, colored women of the Bottom resemble a stump or, in her conviction, are stumps: they are insignificant. They have no value. The only way to recover what they have lost is through a dedicated resistance against male domination. The narrative stresses that Sula lived a single life till death: she did not marry although her grandmother Eva wanted her so. She rejected marriage as she saw in it a restraining weapon that men utilise to subjugate women.

Another metaphor Morrison employs above to reinforce defragmentation in the narrative construction lies in the concept "redwoods". Redwoods are evergreen trees that are classified among the tallest tree species in the world. They are robust and very resistant and usually last longer. Morrison borrows this metaphor of "redwoods" to emphasise the role of fortitude as it leads to victory. In a first-person narration, Sula compares herself to a redwood, "Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods" (p.143). Conscious of the threat she has been facing in the Bottom, she never surrendered. For her, she knows she is an unshakeable woman who succeeds to defy the community's misconception. Her stable self leads her to achieve strong victory through a heroic death. This determination that Morrison attributes to the character of Sula strengthens her personality and perception of the world around her. She rejects the all accusations that the community members attribute her. Sula never submits her ego to the wishes of the Bottom. She consolidates her individuality and reconciles with her friend Nel and her own self before she dies. Sula dies Sula in whole: the contestations against her personality do not affect her individuality. Resistant like

redwoods, she never groans on her deathbed till she expires. In her agonising state and in the death that later follows, Morrison builds another form of defragmentation that is attained through silence.

Significantly, Sula's death provides moral relief for both Sula herself and her haters. The double defragmentation of the then fragmented selves that Morrison introduces at this point bears a particular twist: Sula's haters believe her death comes as a retribution for the misconduct and the subsequent oddities she brought to the community. Yet, the same death believed to be retribution provides moral comfort to Sula who departs joyfully with a serene ataraxia.

Defragmentation runs also across the writer's narratives in the other horror novels. Although the largest part of events in *Beloved* describes the fragmented identities of slaves under the repression of slavery, the narration brings some instances in the story that come to mitigate the severity of the pain that characters daily experience. Morrison creates a turning point in which reader and narrator come closer to realise how victims under an unspeakable alienation succeed to restore an environment that assures safety against the odds they are challenging. The overall representations of *Beloved's* protagonist Sethe indicate that she is an unfortunate character whose past and present are largely dominated by failure. The narrator ascertains this state of Sethe's sorrow, the "sky provided the only drama, and counting on a Cincinnati horizon for life's principal joy was reckless indeed" (p.4). Sethe is identified by the community as a cruel and heartless mother who does not even care for her own progeny. This is an observation of the Cincinnati neighbours who decide to ostracise her and her daughter Denver from the community. This prejudiced consideration runs throughout the narrative. In the same way, the tyrannical slave master schoolteacher

accuses Sethe of being “cannibal”—an attribute that would rather fit to describe and define schoolteacher himself with regard to his despotic nature. Nonetheless, Morrison deploys a language that tries to mitigate the blame imposed on Sethe; she builds a narrative that includes some images which suggest an apologetic and explanatory state of the protagonist’s societal misapprehension. The fragments of her past life are collected and joined together to reconstruct a defragmented present and a future that empower Sethe to undertake a new life. The past with all its imperfections revealed through the bitter fragmented memories are buried for a unified defragmented present and future that she believes must pave the foundations for a new life as a free and franchised woman. In her conversation with Paul D, she reveals this new sense of belonging that fortifies her being and her daughter Denver forever

I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in-between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth. I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? It cost too much. Now sit down and eat with us or leave us be (p.15).

Sethe’s pain has turned her numb both physically and psychologically. The horrors of stealing her maternal milk while nursing and pregnant, her back transformed into a chokecherry tree as a result of the cruel whipping and the other nightmares she experienced are nullified. She recollects the pain she went through for years and now decides for “no more running from nothing...on this earth”. This ataractic self-confidence comes as a response to a state of accumulated afflictions that have hardened her psyche. The “ticket” she “paid” for the hard “journey” she “took” taught her much to learn from the past and focus on the future. She is resolved now “to sit down and...be”. Sethe feels complete. She has got a new vision of life. The defragmentation of her atomised self solidifies her being and sets to behold a new dawn for existence. With this moral determination, Sethe rejects the consideration of

Beloved as a revenant ghost. She acknowledges her as her fully “real daughter who has come back” to visit her after a long period of separation (p.189).

Morrison shapes her characters by giving them new looks that assist them to fit in the community. Paul D is a traumatised slave who suffered unspeakably the tragic loss of his friends and a dehumanising life that converted him into a trifle. Yet, once in 124, Morrison portrays him improved. After many years of subjugation and wandering, the redemptive force he has acquired invigorates him; he starts pondering on how to live a fully improved life with Sethe as a wife in his waning age of bachelorhood

...you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. I'm not saying this because I need a place to stay. That's the last thing I need. I told you, I'm a walking man, but I been heading in this direction for seven years. Walking all around this place. Upstate, downstate, east, west; I been in territory ain't got no name, never staying nowhere long. But when I got here and sat out there on the porch, waiting for you, well, I knew it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you. We can make a life, girl. A life (p.45).

Paul D asks Sethe her hand to start a new “life” together. For seven years, he has been searching for a bride and found none except Sethe who can satisfy his long-held affection of more than twenty years. He knows there is a past they share which can help foster a common future. That these two characters think to “make a life” together implies that they have locked the fragments of their horrors into the annals of the past which no longer controls their current lives. Now they want to start a new phase of rebirth that defragments the shattered identities into a committed selfhood.

On the narrative ground, defragmentation functions in Morrison’s narratives as an equaliser that serves to balance the antagonistic events and the horrifying situations that the writer puts forth in the depiction of the past and the present of the American society in general and the African American community in particular.

3.5 Conclusion

The complexity of the narrative structure of Morrison's work produces another essential dimension of interpretation. This Chapter explored Morrison's horror novels with reference to its structure and found out that her writing is built upon a significant narrative structure that incarnates an important potential in the transfer of a message. The aesthetic dimension is an essential aspect that completes the thematic one in the construction of meaning. In the first position, the analysis has demonstrated that Morrison's writing is disrupted by the dimension of time represented by the past and the present. The interspersed of these two times at irregular intervals creates a textual disintegration that causes loss of meaning in some cases. This narrative disintegration mirrors particularly the disintegration of the African American community. In addition, this chapter found out that Morrison employs a multiple voiced narration and ambiguity to represent multiple facets of the frustrations, anxieties and the fears of alienation that her characters face. The study also discovered that Morrison utilises the narrative aesthetics of defragmentation to mitigate the pain that characters endure and to demonstrate the possibility of social change which is mirrored in the process of characters' rebirth.

CHAPTER FOUR

ALIENATION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF CHARACTER

DISCONNECTEDNESS

4.1 Introduction

The discourse on horror in Toni Morrison's novels centres primarily on the problematic issues of alienation and subordination that are depicted through the atrocious experiences of characters in various circumstances. Morrison utilises diverse forms of horror—among them the supernatural, 'the disabled body' and 'the marked body'—to reveal various aspects of alienation that stifle the human condition of the African American in general and the African American woman in particular. Beside a poignant record of the socio-cultural alienations that pervade her work, and which essentially emanate from colour bar, the writer makes use also of mental as well as physical disabilities to reveal the agony of the black community. These abnormalities that feature the bodies of some characters are an expression of the several forms of alienation that the writer reveals to decry the evils of social exclusion.

From the supernatural aspect of her writing, Morrison's horror reverses the notion of "the normal". This can be observed from the actions, behaviour as well as the mental and physical dispositions of the bodies of her characters. For instance, some characters suffer from psychosis which, in the end, results in tragic disorientation of their initial missions. The actions they pose introduce a new dimension in the evolution of the story. These states, whether mental or physical, translate a condition of dependence and subordination that confines the victims into a state of alienation. Characters are disconnected from within; they are also disconnected between

themselves and the world around them that they mockingly look at with dejection. This chapter examines the effects of alienation and disconnectedness that drive characters to undertake violent actions in a way to claim social recognition. It explores the various forms of alienation and how they are linked to the horror featured in the writer's work. It attempts to analyse how the writer deploys horror to expose the social impasse which is painted through the alienation of black characters. To achieve this, the analysis is guided by Kristeva's psychoanalytic effects of abjection on a human mind (1982) to understand the distress of socio-cultural exclusion that the African American community suffers. In some stages, the study relies on Freud's psychoanalytic debate on 'The Uncanny' (1919) to scrutinise the *raison d' être* of characters' hidden frustrations which are the main cause of the current agitations—a situation that juts out the alienated state of the victims of racism and an oppressive gendered consciousness.

4.2 Race and Alienation of the Black Soul

Toni Morrison's writing, either fictional or essayistic, aims at challenging the pretentious ideology of the hegemonic white mindset that considers black humanity inferior and *ipso facto* destined to subordination. This unfair judgment overshadows the white dominant culture. Her writing basically condemns the destruction generated by an alienating and exploitative nature of this white racist mindset.

In its basic manifestation, Freud (1919) discusses the uncanny as something 'Unheimlich' that brings out discomfort, an 'unfamiliar' sensation which initiates "the presence of estrangement in a home" (p. 207). In some cases, this estrangement renders an individual alien, unable to meet the totality of his self. Pecola's alienation with her own body enacts this estrangement that renders the young pubescent

unconscious and totally an outsider in her own home. Her self-condemnation that results in a self-alienation creates a state of estrangement that destroys her existence. *The Bluest Eye* provides an excellent model of estrangement that African American people experience at home. Pecola, the protagonist, longs for blue eyes that she believes would give her the outstanding physical beauty of the neighbouring white young girls of her age. She is ashamed of the blackness of her body and feels disgracefully subhuman. In her mind, the black skin and the black eyes she bears are the main causes of her rejection in Lorain. For her, these bodily attributes forfeit her existence as a human being. The racist society she lives in has permeated her morality to the extent that she imagines whiteness as a referential scale to weigh up human beauty. Under the weight of these shadows, Pecola curses her own corporeal blackness exacerbated by her eyes that she perceives as ‘discrediting black eyes’ (p.78). She feels guilty of her own body. This lack of self-affirmation preludes Pecola’s downfall. The incompleteness that she thinks her body bears creates a pit that hypothecates the prospects to achieve maturity. Caught into an erroneous and estranged idealisation of the beauty of the white girls of her neighbourhood, her body is no longer a body but a trash to relinquish at all costs. She naively seeks to detach from it in the objective to obtain another body that would re-establish her person into a veritable *home*. But this ‘home’ she longs for is an illusion—a sort of shadow that will break definitively what is waning and which, in fact, needs stronger stanchions to stand. Her existence relies on the opinions and principles of her coterie. She lacks an independent thinking that would empower her to make right judgment from the misleading company of the white youth that surround her. Pecola’s estrangement that precipitates her fall starts from within: her dependent morality is worsened by her

own parents who do not reserve their daughter a careful attention to surmount the growing challenges she is experiencing in her younger age.

In *Sula*, there are similar issues of estrangement and alienation that disconnect characters in several circumstances. Shadrack has become insane after the traumatic experiences of World War One. He has become paranoid and suspects every situation he encounters including the shadow of his own body. To react against the threatening forces of the fears for the future, we saw previously how he initiates the 'National Suicide Day', an event in which he believes the subordinated black community of the Bottom should lock their fears in order to free themselves from the white subjugation. Shadrack's estrangement is exacerbated by an abject state caused by the bleak conditions that he faces in the Bottom after his return from War. He has developed a suspicious feeling about the prevalent social upheavals that are shaking the Bottom. He has lost the real sense of existence and mortgages his life into suicide that he thinks it would abridge the sufferings of the black community.

This alienation enslaves women who become games to the preying nature of the male characters. Due to fears of being unloved and rejected, these women capitulate to a forced sexist oppression that mortifies their social consideration. Pauline Breedlove and Nel Wright, respectively in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, are the representative figures of this sexist alienation. Both women are prisoners of their husbands; they have been converted into sexual toys. Nel observes vainly her husband Jude Greene who flirts with Sula without concealing his instinctive drives. She anxiously follows the developments of the humiliating affair of her husband and Sula until the "lovers consume their love" (p.89). Yet she neither retaliates nor manifestly protests against the fornication. She silently accepts the deception. After Jude's elopement with Sula,

he comes back home; he is received by his betrayed wife Nel who passively accepts the return unconditionally. She feels embarrassed but restrains to question Jude about his shameful departure that the whole Bottom still curses. Surprisingly, Nel is a responsible woman who takes care of both her husband and children appropriately irrespective of the deceptions she experiences. Morrison shapes the character of Nel who incessantly has to abide by the malevolent demands. She complies with Jude's demands and sacrifices her life to make him happy. Jude is portrayed as a parasite and a traitor. He does not consider his wife an equal companion in the household. Before he married Nel, his ambition was to obtain a wife whom he could easily dominate in order to impose his power. But this power is absolutely flawed: his barbarous conduct which results into the destruction of his wife and his own household has roots in the hardships of the alienated existence he is leading.

On the subject of the manifestation of the uncanny, Freud (*ibid.*) argues that the presence of the uncanny is a sign of "what might be kept secret but unfortunately shows up as the body undergoes a threat and cannot retain the shock" (p.228). Jude's licentiousness can be perceived as a microcosmic representation of the painful frustrations held back by the black community for long and which, at the moment, come out due to the body's incapacity to manage the shock and conceal the aftermaths it represses for many years ago. It is important to know that Jude was born and grew in the Bottom—a village which is at the mercy of the wealthy whites of Medallion. With the other youth of the village, they grew despised and frustrated by the racial exploitation of Medallion. They felt outsiders in their own home. The exclusion of black workers among whom Jude is included in the construction of the New River Road exacerbates the anger and frustrations they had repressed over years. The overflow of rage and resentment turns Jude and his friends into alien individuals who

care for nothing as their morality has become unemotional and hardhearted. The violence that he perpetrates over his wife induces a psychological release of these accumulated disappointments. He has been emasculated by the white man and he unfortunately wants to prove to the community that the humanity he has lost is now restored through a naïve oppression of his wife. Having no capacity to challenge the real oppressor, Jude empties his anger on Nel who becomes a scapegoat and victim of a situation for which she is not responsible.

Morrison's *Beloved* unveils various cases of alienation based on racist ideology. The narrative presents the slave community struggling frantically against the white master who considers them a primitive humanity. Brown (2007) notes that "slave women were considered breeders when men were simple smiths" (p.112). During slavery, women were sexually abused by masters to satisfy their lustful desires. While men were brutally whipped most of the time irrationally, women were sexually harassed and taken to sessions of public fondling for the white man's pleasure. At the auction market, they were publicly exposed wholly unclothed to the pretending buyer-clients who would conceitedly record all the features of those women in an animalistic context (Holman, 2009, p.177). For Du Bois (1963), "a slave woman is treated as an unwed mother; so few women are born free; the mocked husband has no right to be a father of his offspring nor a real head of the household" (p.234). The depersonalisation faced by slaves affected profoundly women. Beside colour, the woman's body was a centre of interest. Oppressed both as a female and as a black individual, the objectification of women made them strange.

Morrison models the character of Sethe in *Beloved* to decry this humiliating alienation that the slave woman suffered at the hand of the white tormentor. With all its cruel

facets, life in Sweet Home is glaringly narrated in a style that unearths systematically the horrors of the time and what it really meant 'to be a slave' in the socio-cultural and historical contexts of human existence. Sethe's journey into slavery is so pathetic. There are several instances that explain the affliction and the subsequent frustrations she has gone through for many years: her mother's innocent hanging and her own entry into bondage at the younger age of thirteen, her brutal whipping by schoolteacher that deformed her back into a chokecherry tree, her inflamed legs due to the long trip to Ohio while fleeing the Southern animosity, the painful delivery of Denver in a yacht within distressful conditions while fleeing Sweet Home, the intrusion of schoolteacher in 124 and the resulting murder of her weaned baby whose ghost shows up some years later, the haunting of her home by the ghost...explicate the alienated state of Sethe's existence. Her painful past buried into the subconscious resurfaces by the time she perceives her former master and tormentor in her private home. The intimacy provided by Freud's home (p.207) is violated. Sethe cannot tolerate this invasion that shatters her self and causes the bowl to overflow. The violation of her home triggers a shock that Freud's uncanny describes once the repressed frustrations resurface. This shock explicates Sethe's violent and tragic assault on her children. She places the love of her children at the centre of their existence. Though socially miserable and psychologically depressed, the love she develops for her children is very powerful. It is this immense affection that prompts the mother to slay her children in order to 'protect' them against the evils of slavery. That she deliberately resolves to kill her progeny entails an excessive abject state which has impacted her psyche. She is disconnected from within. Whatever hurting her children would be hurting her own flesh and soul; the saw that cut out Beloved's throat eighteen years ago transpierces Sethe's being and her humanity crumbles.

Because of numerous preoccupations that have inundated her psyche, she has become numb; she neither weeps nor regrets the murder. Though in pain, her morality assures her a resolute space to be a mother despite the ostracisation she faces from neighbours. Yet, she bears the mark of the deceased Beloved in the depth of her conscience. In her secluded existence, Sethe is under the burden of the past. While ruminating on the past afflictions, she gets heartbroken. The recollections of the past overshadow the moral relief she has acquired after the disappearance of the ghost.

At first sight, Sethe's house bears a claustrophobic picture that suggests her social and psychological embarrassment. The ongoing haunting has transformed the family into a lair: her mother-in-law Baby Suggs died a victim of the ghost's spiteful haunting; her sons, Howard and Buglar, fled this home never to return after they had witnessed the sprite's vindictive attack on the family. What makes the situation worse, the community of Cincinnati maintains the social ban over her. This ban oppresses the woman as she starts developing some signs of monomania. Sethe is believed to be morally impure and the community decides to keep her at bay until the impurity she is suspected to bear vanishes. They are afraid of an impending spread of this uncleanness to the rest of the community. Before Sethe's murder, Cincinnati was a peaceful community. The affectionate hospitality that the community reserved to Sethe and her children attested the serenity and brotherhood between its members. But her crime brought a curse to the entire neighbourhood. The infanticide she committed incriminates the entire black community in the eyes of the white environment. This community feels offended in its inner self. White masters have suspected slaves of an incarnation of some 'biological traits' of animals. Schoolteacher's measurement of Sethe's body was prompted by this racist suspicion (p.87). Sethe's act of killing of her own baby gave reason to the biased conception

held by those whites about the suspected animalistic identity that blacks would incarnate. This collective affront born of Sethe's crime infuriates the black community. They feel psychologically wounded to be equated with animals; and this wrong accusation hardens the psychological scars they have repressed from the South. Although the crime was committed by Sethe alone, it is accountable to the whole black community. This collective incrimination pains her neighbours who locate the evil of their condemnation into Sethe's felony. They feel morally molested when they are innocently charged of criminals.

In addition, Sethe's social position as a mother exacerbates the blame of the women of her community. They experience a great concern in their identity of mother. The curse brought by Sethe becomes a weapon for the white women of Cincinnati to hold and reinforce an isolative force against the black woman. This anxiety caused by Sethe drives the black community to consider her a threat. The return of the ghost in her home is perceived as a punishment for the shame that she brought to the community. In the beginning, they understand the cause of Beloved's return and the threat she inflicts on her mother as the community itself acts against Sethe. She is totally isolated. Her home is no longer a home but a wasteland. The only person in whom she can confide the secret of her pain is her daughter Denver though she is too young to mull over such intricate matters. Sethe herself is skeptical of the future: she questions the meaning of life and she is lost as the world she lives in is the opposite of the one experienced by her community. Her permanent worries bury the hopes for a possible social recovery

Turned, turned against me and my only daughter. Sure, a thing misses to realize my life. When I reached Cincinnati with all my children, we smiled all of us with Cincinnati in whole. That was a new century of rebirth. Today the back of Cincinnati is turned against me and my Denver. Yes...Beloved isn't with me. And it was worth going somewhere. They need to understand

it. Yes, to understand it and give me life as the other black folk around my Baby Suggs's house. If not, they resurrect Halle and Beloved to impose me an endless burden. And this hurts me terribly (*Beloved*, p.227).

In many situations, Morrison's characters develop similar or related features of alienation. This state of dependency and alienation resurfaces and touches all the generations, young and adults. From Sethe's mother to Beloved, there is a three-generation lineage; each individual from each generation has a body marked of an indelible sign that symbolises the pain they experienced. For instance, Sethe's mother is described having a circle and a cross inside; the patch is marked on her bosom (p.97). This indelible sign is a metaphor of the human objectification that blacks endured during their enslavement. It also personifies the horrors and the alienating nature of slavery. Apart from religious realm, a cross is generally used in many works of social assistance such as health institutions to signify the plight of the other and the compassion to reserve to the victim. Eventually, Sethe's mother was hanged. Morrison stigmatises the disintegration that characterises the black community for ages. Although blacks were a minority, they did not develop a common awareness with regard to the challenges they were facing. Therefore, it is no wonder that they inflict interracial alienation against one another. Some of them were employed by the white masters to track and torture their fellow blacks (Jones, 2013, p.192).

Sethe's mother got the mark from the auction market to be distinguished from other slaves. The mark embodies the pain of the physical and psychological tortures of the condition of slave life. Before hanging, Sethe's mother, who remains unnamed throughout the narrative, instructs her daughter to recognise her body once dead by the corporeal insignia of the circle drawn on her chest (p.103). There is a premonition of death which runs through her body though she restrains to reveal it to her daughter. The daughter does not understand the message; she will come to comprehend its

meaning by the time the mother is hanged, when the head is detached from the body, making difficult to identify the corpse (p.121).

Sethe, on her side, represents the second generation. She also has a corporeal mark of chokecherry tree on her back; this mark is a result of the brutal whippings by schoolteacher and his nephews (*Beloved*, p. 17). Her deformed 'marked' back that generates inadequacy of her body produces an uncanny and shocking look that mirrors the rigidity of the past with regard to slavery. Basically, the presence of a tree in art symbolises nature, life and regeneration while the back of a woman embodies maternity and motherhood; it is the back of a woman that accommodates a baby in its infancy. To profane the back of a woman is to destroy maternity in the first stage and society in the long run. The profaned back in form of a chokecherry tree personifies the violated motherhood of the black woman. A chokecherry tree is a wild tree whose fruits taste bitter. These images are associated with darkness to insinuate the alienated existence of the black slave community. Sethe's back is a deformed body that summarises the aggregate of the horrors the enslaved people experienced.

The third marked generation is represented by Beloved. In her ghostly body, Beloved's throat has an ineffaceable scar all around. The scar reminds readers of Beloved's fatal assault by her mother. Shocked by the unexpected intrusion of schoolteacher in her home, we saw how Sethe questioned the future of her progeny. Imagining the return of a disaster she sadly experienced for years, she felt heartbroken to see her children endure the same pain. In the attempt to protect them, she took a saw and deliberately cut out the throat of the crawling baby. Freud's uncanny can be understood at this juncture. Sethe confronts the return of the repressed horrors of her past experiences. The sudden intrusion of her former master into her home reminds

her of the agony she endured for many years in Sweet Home. She is psychologically wounded and finally acts against her will. Her alienated ego fails to manage the anger caused by the tragedy of enslavement. Slave life has made Sethe cold. She is socially disregarded but keeps enough hope to survive the obstacles she is facing.

Under a horrific linear representation of successive generations of victims of the same evil, Morrison suggests that racism is a contagious disease that spares nobody and which can destroy humanity no matter the colour, class, age or gender. It transcends the boundaries of the normal to create a world of horror where immorality, irrationality and barbarism reign.

Significantly, *Beloved* chronicles in detail the horrors slaves underwent since the time they were snatched from their homeland. In the slave America, slaves were not allowed to possess anything even their children. The denial to parents to benefit ownership right over the progeny alienated profoundly women and converted mothers into strange individuals. Psychologically, women suffered more than men. At different times, they were robbed helplessly either their husbands or their children without prior notification. Willis (2006) argues that “the tragedy of a woman’s alienation is its effect on her as a mother. Her emotions split; she showers tenderness and love on her children knowingly that they may be taken away from her at any time the illegal owner decides” (p.265). The historical Margaret Garner (Jacobson, 2009, p.82) chose to kill her daughter knowing that she would be sent to gallows. Prior to the murder, her husband and other children had been taken away and she was left alone murmuring over the meaning of life under colour bar. Morrison’s imagination of Sethe enacts the historical disappointments of this mother.

In *Sula*, Eva Peace is too much concerned with her son's drug addiction. She recollects the past of Plum's health and cannot bear anything that would bring him back into a state of degenerative health and physical dependency. In a state of total dilemma, Eva finally pours oil over Plum and sets fire on his body; he burns mercilessly to death (p.68). Eva feels relieved to see her son die, "there wasn't space for him in my womb" (p.74). The degenerative health of Plum had become a great concern for the mother. But this relief conceals the agony she keeps inside her being for a long period. The immolation of her son which brings the mother some kind of relief exteriorises the excess of trauma she bears and which has never found a positive response. This immolation is prompted by Eva's painful memories of the struggle she endured with Plum's dependency since he returned from War. The return of the repressed hardships about her son's poor health, the pain of abandonment by her husband and the subsequent poverty that is striking her family torment Eva who is now torn between the past and the present. The immolation of her son Plum materialises her alienated state deepened by the resurfacing of all these frustrations exacerbated by the racial exclusion that she suffers at the hand of the white Medallion. She has been abandoned by her husband to struggle alone with her children whom she is unable to provide the primary needs to survive. The pain of abandonment and the subsequent poverty reinforce the permanent burden of social exclusion imposed on her by the racist social structure of the white community of Medallion. Although Eva gets relieved to see her son Plum die as she has no more "space in [her] womb" for him, her violent reaction calms her alienation only at surface. The act does not settle the agitated state of the desperate woman. The immolation of Plum acts as a mask which veils the socio-economic pain she is enduring. The return of her repressed agony becomes even apparent when she

consciously sacrifices her leg, which is cut off by a train. Eva's intentional loss of her leg attests that the immolation of Plum was neither performed out of compassion she felt for her son's degenerative health nor a solution to end the boy's grief. Her violent reaction was driven by a soothing act to forget the misery and the other stressful social challenges she is facing.

Some critics interpret Morrison as a writer whose fiction deals with characters featured by dual morality. In an interview with Mackay (1994), Morrison stated that her characters are a "combination of virtue and flaw...of wickedness cleansed and people made whole again. If you judge them all by the best that they have done, they are wonderful. If you judge them by the worst that they have done, they are terrible" (p.423). This duality in action that is embedded in some characters is also another important manifestation of alienation and disconnectedness. It is the main ailment that haunts the writer's main characters particularly Pauline Breedlove, Sethe and Milkman. In many circumstances, these characters are indecisive. On one side, they are disconnected from other characters; they engage independent actions which unfortunately affect the lives of other characters and the environment around them. On the other side, each character is disconnected from within. This inner disconnection results in a psychological disturbance that jeopardises the lives of these characters who are condemned in the long run to self-destruction. In the beginning, *Song of Solomon* presents Milkman obsessed with amassing wealth in order to do away with his rival father. At the same time, he is portrayed developing a strong love for his cousin Hagar whom he promises to marry. Surprisingly, Milkman who is malleable by character and inconsistent in decision-making severs the old relationship that had made him and Hagar more than lovers but nearly bride and groom. This breakage in love alienates Hagar who goes mad and later commits suicide (p.69).

One of the most important factors responsible for characters' alienation emanates from the radicalisation of a racial ideology in a multiracial community. The crux of Morrison's oeuvre investigates the history, the roots and the struggle of black people in America. When the deported Africans reached America, they were forcibly subjected to inhuman treatment. Springs (2011) outlines the inhuman exactions that were hardening the living conditions of blacks

Whites would not bear the presence of the blacks as human companions to live with. Every path was cleared to make distinction from those they were taxing to be coming from bush and begotten by earthly spirits. Working without wage under daily whip was the usual cup they were fed. Falling sick without care and dying pitilessly, working almost round-the-clock without rest catalyzed the bleak living conditions. Having no right to possess, not even your son or wife, or even to contract marriage, having no promoting or protective rights but numberless duties to fulfil were other elements of the crucifix that the race of the other side of the Atlantic—the black race—knew more than anyone on the planet (p.157).

The presence of the 'Kentucky plantations' in *Beloved* suggests to the evils of slavery and the epitome of alienation for the black slave who has to labour for the white with no wage and more achingly with no rest at the price of a daily whip. Slaves work and sleep in the plantations without protection. Once a slave manifests signs of physical weakness due to body's exhaustion or illness, there is no immediate action to assist him. He is rather accused of disobedience or rebellion. It is in the plantations where Sixo is burnt alive and where Paul A is dismembered. The same plantations house the repression office of schoolteacher and his nephews. They beat Sethe savagely and abuse her sexually in the same plantations. Paradoxically, young Sethe and Halle consented and later consummated their marriage in the cornfield of the same plantations as they were denied an official ceremony. Hence, the cornfields, the sugar cane, the cotton and the tobacco plantations which receive the unpaid labour of the slaves incarnate the pain and the frustrations generated by the racialist ideology. More

specifically, Morrison's creation of Sethe mirrors the duality of death and existence in the condition of enslavement: one has to kill the other in order to protect him. True love and peaceful life lie in death which locks out the fears of further afflictions. Filled with the affections of a mother, Sethe has the obligation to protect the life of her progeny at all costs although she has little capacity to act.

Almost all the characters in *Beloved* are identified with a disconnected identity that renders them alien and always dependent. Paul D questions the meaning and place of his manhood as a man. Having been emasculated by people of same gender, he wonders whether in America there are individuals who have been created to control and predetermine the destiny of others or there are individuals who were inherently created to be servants of other people. He does not understand how a man can abuse another man in the presence a woman. Paul D imagines if under the blackness of his skin lies the inferiority of which he is reproached.

In her discussion of the relation between alienation and abjection, Barbara Creed argues that "the place of abjection is where meaning collapses" (2009, p. 218). Paul D cannot understand how human existence would be explained by means of an individual's colour of skin. In his opinion, there is no relation that links a person to his colour. This connection initiated by his oppressor 'collapses' or simply *fails* to justify the mystery of human existence in the way Paul D grasps it. Confident in his complete individuality as a man though his manhood is contested, he decides to resist the racial exploitation to which he is permanently subjected. He defies schoolteacher's bigotry who wants to reduce him to a commodity. Paul D is dissatisfied with the life he experiences in Sweet Home. He fell heartbroken when he saw his fellow brothers Paul A and Sixo murdered. By the time they watch helplessly Sixo burning, the two

brothers Paul A and Paul D decide to run away. But they are not successful as they are intercepted. Pretending to punish the fugitives, schoolteacher dismembers Paul A to death and sells Paul D. Paul D is at this time resold to another master. All these frustrating events are buried into his subconscious and he seeks to break the chains. Once he learns that he was sold at a price of nine hundred dollars, he falls heart-stricken. Paul D “heard schoolteacher auction him with Brandywine. He became anxious and only would want to know the value schoolteacher received. Nine hundred dollars mattered to cede Paul D and he was handed over the following night” (p.177). He begins to question the price of life to know if his life is really worth nine hundred dollars.

Upon the threat of numerous dissatisfactions that have emerged to dominate his conscious and seeking to break the chains of alienation, Paul D concocts a murder: he decides to kill his new master Brandywine (p. 121). Unfortunately, he fails. As a result, he is put in jail in Alfred Prison, Georgia where together with other black inmates is sexually abused by the white guards. All prisoners are awfully subjected to an oral sex everyday at dawn just before a new day comes (p. 137). Paul D goes in prison with a dehumanising metal ring attached to his mouth. The ring suggests the depersonalisation and the cruelty of slavery. Beyond the pain of physical threats they endure, they have no freedom to comment on the bleakness and rigidity of life. Paul D is condemned to carry this ring all his life. Symbolically, the pierced mouth embodies also the hatred and the horrors of black objectification that characterised the slave life. Morrison introduces these terrifying images to depict the dehumanising past that had Balkanised America into two distant communities for ages.

At the time *Beloved* was released (1987), slavery had been abolished around a century earlier. However, that slavery ended long ago yet racial tensions persist and continue to tear the 1970s America disturbs Morrison. She feels embarrassed to see blacks still living under the watchful eye and the hurtful chains of poverty. In Morrison's view, the superiority of a race upon another is unfounded in a society that evolved through time upon collective contributions of immigrants irrespective of colour and origin. Morrison is convinced that both whites and blacks live in America as outsiders who emigrated from Africa and Europe no matter the contexts of 'immigration' differed. In her opinion, all those communities contributed to the construction and edification of America. Ultimately, the writer is persuaded that neither the black nor the white has the right to claim the monopoly of ownership of America. They have equal rights over the society and should share its opportunities with equity within the context of brotherhood rather greed and subordination.

The Bluest Eye traces also many cases of alienation that initiate disorientation between characters' actions and what they are expected to fulfil in the society. Pauline Breedlove is an old mother. Yet, she despises her own home to the profit of the white family she works for. She develops deeper maternal affection for the child of the white family and rejects her own progeny that she has left home. In her conjugal life, she is disconnected from her drunkard husband who beats her everyday; and the effect of this household oppression results in the rejection of her own children—an act that can be understood as self-denial and a rejection of her own individuality. As Pauline reaches home back from work, her daughter Pecola confides in her how she was brutalised and finally raped by her father Cholly Breedlove (p.99). The mother disbelieves the revelations and she resentfully beats her. She pays no attention to the pain her daughter has been experiencing in the day. However, when Pecola decided to

tell her mother the scandal, she was expecting to be consoled as her self has been torn apart and needs some kind of moral relief. The consolation she seeks turns into grief. And what is more hurting for Pecola is that she is denied support by an individual she expects would be compassionate with her predicament. Pauline has no attention toward her daughter; yet in the white family where she works as a maid, she shows much tenderness toward the children of the family and takes care of them affectionately. She “would wash them, feed them nice meal and take the little boy gently to bed” (p.118). This psychosocial ambivalence explains the disconnected state of Pauline’s existence: her home has become alien and outlandish while her workplace has become the favourite family to preserve instead. Kristeva (ibid.) describes abjection as that “which inherently disturbs conventional identity” (p. 32). Pauline suffers from an abject state that ‘disturbs her identity’ of wife and mother. Her abject state creates alienation that disconnects her physical and social existence from both her family and the community of Lorain. The pain of permanent loneliness, the perpetual quarrels and agitated conjugal life and beyond all her self-conviction of a physical inadequacy among other women due to her lame foot and a lost tooth alienates her existence. Pauline’s abject mind freezes the hopes for a better household. This situation turns the woman into a schizophrenic individual who suspects and disbelieves everybody in the community, starting by herself and her own home.

In the narrative, Morrison develops an awfully shocking instance of alienation and disconnectedness with the dilemma faced by the protagonist. Beside Pecola’s molestation by her father, the nine-year narrator, Claudia MacTeer, narrates other painful circumstances that happen to the young girl. Pecola Breedlove is obsessed with blue eyes that she believes they shall give her the corporeal beauty she thinks she lacks. In her reveries, such eyes would turn her into a lovely and good-looking girl to

be loved and more appreciated in the neighbourhood. In the end, this obsession drives the young adolescent to insanity. In Pecola's view, whiteness embodies beauty and perfection; she curses her black skin and believes that blackness is responsible for her miserable existence.

Pecola is psychologically wounded by the humiliation she undergoes from the interactions she makes with the whites of her neighbourhood. This humiliation rooted in the unjustified 'imperfection' of her body enslaves the girl; she grows emotionally disturbed and develops a severe case of mania that prompts her to lose the real sense of human existence. In her youthful innocence, young Pecola is reproached that she is ugly. This prejudiced reproach is normal as long as it is postulated by the whites of her community. But what breaks the camel's back is that she consents and concedes to the racial affronts against her personality. She does not take time to cogitate and investigate on what actually goes wrong with her body; she is aggressively told that she is ugly and takes the outrage as granted. In order to combat the stigma based on the prejudiced ugliness, she starts thinking how to get 'blues eyes' which, in her opinion, would convert her 'ugliness' into a fascinating beauty that would make her resemble the white young girls of her village. Actually, Pecola Breedlove is not physically ugly; and nobody in the black community has testified her ugliness. However, because the Breedloves are poor, they are also 'ugly' in the eyes of the wealthy whites of Lorain. Their financial dependency makes them not only financially incapable but also physically abnormal. This dual abnormality bears the ugliness of Pecola that the white neighbourhood charges her to incarnate.

Curiously, Pecola's isolation couples with her mother's solitude. Above, we saw how Pauline Breedlove is a lonely mother and a wife disconnected from both her husband

and her children. This psychosocial disorientation affects her husband as well in his status of father and spouse. Pecola's father, Cholly Breedlove, fails to assure the primary needs of the family. This failure to maintain the familial duties as a father prejudices the security of the house and breaks the unity of the family: father, wife and children become three separate entities under same roof. The incapacity of the father brings shame and dishonour to Pecola who has to bear the burden imposed on her by the white neighbourhood. She has been told and taught that she deserves no love and has understood that those social claims are founded. This despair is exacerbated by the fact that part of her close company is convinced that she has lost common sense. Heart-stricken by this rejection and unable to find moral assistance, she implores God to disappear, "Please God...please God make me disappear" (p.33). Pecola's abject ego engenders a psychological isolation that worsens the deplorable conditions of her personal existence and her family. She is excluded from both sides—friends and parents; and this alienation enslaves her. While assessing Kristeva's claims on abjection, Creed (*ibid.*) maintains that the place of the abject is "where one is not" (p. 113). Pecola is no longer in the place where she might be. She does not live her real existence: she lives an illusory world that has alienated her humanity. At this stage, Morrison indicates how alienation denaturalises an individual and how it renders him strange. At the end of her tragic journey and under the weight of this alienation, Pecola goes insane.

What is frustrating in Cholly's house is that Pecola's mother is experiencing alienation much greater and more painfully than her daughter. Her status as a mother peters out from time to time. In addition to the home pain she suffers, she is reduced to a puppet by the white family she works for. Most significantly, she has become an eternal martyr upon the disdain and the daily violent assaults by her husband. She has

become stiff in her private life and usually ignites quarrels with her husband to beat her more in order to reinforce her status of martyr.

In her approach to abjection, Kristeva (1982) evokes the state of *jouissance*. In Kristeva's psychoanalytic terms, *jouissance* is a psychological state which occurs after an individual has experienced the ultimate painful and agonising state which itself has turned out to be normal as the agony lasted longer without an appropriate response. The pain turns into a way of life for the subject who is no longer interested in the grief with which he has become traditionally familiar (p.89). *Jouissance* can also be equated to psychological numbness where pain, either physical or mental, disappears and leaves space to emotionlessness and coldness because of an excess of trauma and depression. The accumulation of tragic horrors and deceptions results in a state of deadness where pain does not actually disappear. It lodges into one's subconscious and its tension gradually decreases, leaving the victim into a transitional stage located between agony and pleasure. In the long run, *Jouissance* is sometimes the source of some mental disorders like paranoia, schizophrenia, dementia or mania.

With regard to Pauline's disconnected self, her agony has reached the stage of Kristeva's *jouissance*: she is sure she cannot physically resist her husband's violent fighting; yet, in many cases, she ignites quarrels to irritate and provoke him—quarrels that result into cruel beatings that she always takes a blow. Cholly beats her nearly to death but she keeps sparking fighting. This explains the extreme psychological dejection that has devastated Pauline's psyche. Surprisingly, Cholly does not feel pity of his wife's physical inability. In the grief of the brutal beatings she undergoes, she feels relieved. The perpetual antagonism with her husband Cholly and the harsh censures of Lorain have transformed Pauline's personality into an insensible woman.

It is this insensibility, that is *jouissance* achieved, which has stiffened her mind and therefore prompts her to malevolently assault her daughter while crying for assistance over the agony of rape she is enduring.

In *The Bluest Eye's* narrative, we learn that Pauline Breedlove has got a mishap that made her foot lame evermore; she has also lost one tooth. In addition to the existing vile conditions of life, this physical disability reinforces her state of dependency. The disability takes her *jouissance* to a highest stage that proves a disconnected existence from the community. The horrific experiences she has gone through for ages have transformed Pauline into an unfeeling woman. Considered jointly, the three characters of the Cholly house, that is, Cholly himself, his wife Pauline and their daughter Pecola are identified by a state of disconnectedness; for an outsider, there is no apparent relation which can attest that these characters are individuals of one household who share in common the closest kin relationships of wife and husband on one side, and of father, mother and daughter on the other side. One can observe that these characters are locked into three distant worlds that converge on one common aspect: a disconnected perception of the world around them. Kristeva's abjection that exteriorises through the 'disturbance of the conventional identity' can be understood at this stage (p.32). It is hard to understand how a husband, a wife and a child build three distinctive homes within one household. The authority of parenthood is questionable while the obedience of a child vis-à-vis parents is doubted. Beyond the inner disconnection these characters experience, they are also disconnected from the realities of the neighbourhood which seeks to strengthen their exclusion as a retribution and reformation to bring them back to reason. In their horrifying disconnected existence, they cannot relate to one another.

Morrison's writing is inspired by the hardships of the human condition of the African American community in a "wholly racialized world" (Sinha, 2011, p.47). She decries the racial stereotypes that are fragmenting America. She rejects the degrading treatments these stereotypes bring to the black community, "I am always annoyed about why Black people have to bear the brunt of everybody else's contempt. If we are not totally understanding and smiling, suddenly we are demons" (Mackay, 1994, p.47). The writer condemns both the oppressor and the oppressed for a lack of a clearly defined understanding of one's responsibility to transform the society. More decisively, she attacks the victimised for their inaction to deny an endless dehumanisation. That one feels no preoccupation with the alienating pain of racism and its horrors, Macay believes that such an individual would resemble a "demon". By nature, demons are spirits; and spirits cannot experience pain or distress since they are deprived of humanity. Macay launches a call for the victimised to ban passivity and engage their efforts to claim back the defiled humanity.

While Morrison stigmatises the horrors of racism, she reveals the socioeconomic impact caused by this abyss. Pauline prohibits her daughter to call her 'mother'. She instructs Pecola to call her by the usual name 'Mrs. Breedlove' or simply 'Pauline' anytime her daughter wants to address her. Pecola does not understand the motive of her mother's denial to address her appropriately. In the American tradition, it is uncommon for children to address parents by real names. It outrages the duty and respect that children owe parents and such behaviour would discredit both parents and children. However, what surprises the reader is that it is the mother 'Pauline' herself who urges her daughter to address her by the real name. Had it been the opposite, the community of Lorain would have interpreted the case as an act of misconduct of Pecola vis-à-vis her mother. The reader's curiosity interrogates this unusual and

ambivalent choice: why does Pauline instruct her daughter Pecola to address her so strangely in a community where children never call parents by name?

Pauline Breedlove does not feel delighted to be addressed by her daughter Pecola as her mother. In her secluded and alienated self, Pauline has lost the feeling of motherhood and maternity. She has been shamefully abused by her husband in the presence of their children repeatedly and for many years; her ego has turned into a wasteland; she feels deprived of maternal sensitivity. In her existence, parenthood has vanished; and the pride to be called a mother by her daughter whom she despises, hardens more her alienated self. There is a veil that has covered her face and thereby buried the hopes and love for her family. Pauline behaves even so roughly toward her daughter Pecola who has little knowledge about her mother's dilemma. The reader needs to know her past which might be accountable for her present awful reactions. Pauline's alienation is explained by the hard circumstances evoked above and that still have repercussions on her life. These frustrations are exacerbated by traumatic memories of a doctor who assisted her in childbirth. Pauline was heart-stricken when she heard the doctor who was lecturing his students that black women do not feel pain while giving birth. The doctor's racist declarations to his students, "they are just horses" (p.97), shocked Pauline who was still lying on the childbirth bed listening to the abusive talk. To compare human beings to horses is beyond debatable point. However, even animals feel pain just like humans though the latter have tendency to minimise the ache that animals endure; and the pain of childbirth is sensed by both humans and animals at least if we restrain to take a penchant.

The racist judgment on maternal pain gave Pauline the last blow. It ruined the hopes for an inclusive racial cohabitation. This affront recurs in her mind whenever

she goes angry with her husband or the community. That the pain of childbirth increases or decreases its intensity with regard to colour made Pauline permanently sick. From the time on, she started questioning the connection between race and motherhood. She has lost the parental and nurturing tenderness because of the excessive accumulation of dreadful alienating deceptions. This alienation has ruined the maternal affection towards her children. It has created a rift in the household—a fracture which materialises into a permanent conflict that opposes herself to her daughter Pecola and her husband Cholly. All these misadventures have made her have a second view of the world. Frustrations have turned her paranoid; and the isolating gap between her and her daughter is explained by this state of depression and helplessness that has marred both her pre-marital and marital lives. This situation of Pauline's predicament renders her daughter Pecola orphan. It deprives the girl of the privilege of maternal affection that a child of her age would benefit from parents. For the girl, her mother's existence has little significance as it plays minor role to meet her needs as a child toward a parent and more importantly a mother-parent. This situation of maternal rejection worsens Pecola's burning dilemma of 'ugliness'. The rejection she endures from her mother accidentally convinces the girl that people's opinion about her 'ugliness' is realistic. In her fantasy, the 'ugliness' she believes her physical body bears becomes a reality.

Admittedly, Pecola—thirteen years old—is too young to meditate on the vital issues of 'who' she really is and 'how' she actually looks. She only relies on the community's mere descriptions of her body. For every public verbal attack, for any rejection by her mother or for any molestation by her father, Pecola buries all the humiliations into the unconscious. This repression destroys the potential that should lead the young girl to maturity. She gradually loses herself and this situation impacts

on her future life. This is exemplified by the protagonist's descent into madness that occurs in the end of the narrative. Pecola goes insane after she has been molested for a second time by her own father and consequently impregnated; this insanity is, in addition, deepened by a terrible street life as the family house has been burnt down by the father who also goes mad after the community of Lorain has cursed him for the ominous crime of incest he committed.

The early roots of Pecola's tragedy originate from the family's collective acceptance of ugliness. All of them suffer multiple forms of alienation. They are always dependent in everything needed to make the family survive; this state of economic dependency makes them lose self-esteem as they give themselves little value. The socioeconomic crisis of the family affects the psychology of the Breedloves; they start to internalise an erroneous thinking that they are ugly and consequently do not merit an equal consideration with other members of the community of Lorain whether black or white. This imagined ugliness taunts, haunts and even enslaves the family. The narrator mentions that "no one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly...Their ugliness was unique" (p.38). Pecola becomes the chief sacrificial victim of the house. The racial and economic marginalisation prompts other stereotypes that create the physical ugliness which the family does not in reality have.

In the development of the narrative, the protagonist Pecola Breedlove is presented as a tragic character whose tragedy sounds more horrific as it affects a pubescent child who has not reached the stage of mature reasoning and self-reliance and may never reach such a stage considering that alienation is total for all ages in the community. More poignantly, she has little knowledge about the current challenges of race,

colour, class and gender that the black community is facing and has to transcend. Being a child, she is only sensitive to her mother's irritation and the ostracisation by her friends who condemn energetically her humiliating insentience for 'blue' eyes. Evoking the concept of 'blue' in the mind of Pecola's young black friends infuriates them as it recalls the evils of racism and white domination which impair the socio-cultural and economic growth of the black community.

Importantly, Morrison started to draft *The Bluest Eye* in the 1960s when the Black Panther movement was at its climax in America. Its motto '*Black is Beautiful*' called the attention of many black youth who were aspiring for change. The movement's main concern was to claim back the defiled beauty and humanity of the African American citizens. It was claiming the equality between races and an acknowledged self-affirmation of blacks themselves. 'Blackness' was at the centre of the movement's creed. They proclaimed a self-redefinition in which self-defence was given a central status ("Black Panther Party", *Microsoft® Student 2009*). Morrison wrote *The Bluest Eye* as a reflection to draw the attention of the African American community about the duties they had to fulfil in the objective to attain a dignified consideration in the society. The rise of a new conformism and adhesion to the white mannerisms by the black youth disturbed Morrison and the black arena who thought a new way of life would be established to prevent the eclipse of the black existence.

While conversing with Nelly Mackay, the writer stated that "the reclamation of racial beauty in the sixties stirred these thoughts," a sort of reflections rooted in the reaffirmation of the grandeur of the black colour in the cosmopolitan America (ibid. p.167). This message, both political and cultural, would put right the young girls' wronged conceptions whose ideas on beauty lied in whiteness. Though different in

their socio-cultural and historical struggles, Pecola and Sethe go through same bitter experiences of racism and sexism. In this conception, the writer shows that the American issues of race, gender and sexual exploitations are historically old and need an immediate action to rescue the society which is on the verge of collapse. Obviously, Morrison chooses women protagonists and many main female characters that have to face horrific situations to insinuate that these issues affected women much more painfully than men and continue to impact profoundly on the woman's existence in the present-day America. The woman appears more vulnerable and needs a special care to restore her humanity.

4.3 The Body's Condition in the Representation of the Multifaceted Black Alienation

In some literary and artistic works, writers and painters represent the human body in a state of decay or disability. The decaying body and the disabled one are usually represented in the two existing dimensions of a body: the physical and the mental states. The features of decay and disability abound with Morrison's characters whose lives are found amid dangerous obstacles that they have to resist for fear that they perish.

Body in Morrison's fiction usually echoes the historical pain experienced by the African American community on its journey to selfhood. Success and failure, pain and happiness, love and hate, and anxiety and determinism are motifs that recur at various stages with a noticeable connection to the instances of corporeal malfunctions that the writer puts into play. Through the use of the disabled body, the writer brings in realism which gains more ground over fantasy: the cases found in *Sula*, *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* are indicative.

Beginning by *Sula*, the reader observes that this novel is not a collection of stories for entertainment: it is a repertoire of the current socioeconomic challenges of poverty, fornication, failing marriages, racism and gender that haunt the Black America and which impact in some way on the white community. There is a certain connectedness between the disabilities portrayed in the novel and the pain generated by these challenges. For instance, in *Sula*, Shadrack has mental disturbances and a lame foot: his insanity is a result of the atrocities of World War One in which he was a combatant. His foot is now crippled as he was impaled by a nail that pierced him through the boot (p.17). This double disability creates an uncanny state: the physical and mental incompleteness of his body projects a shocking portrait of the character who was once fully living by himself but now is totally dependent. This state of dependency alienates the man who has become a stranger at home. Now a veteran, the community of the Bottom has difficulty to recognise, accept and integrate him. He has become an outsider in his own home.

Another acute instance of disability that this novel raises concerns Eva Piece's leg. Unable to meet family needs after she has been abandoned by her husband BoyBoy Peace, Eva deliberately placed her leg on a railroad. A train passed over the leg and cut it out (p.59). Eva acted so dreadfully in order to secure insurance from which she could get financial means to make her family survive the starvation that is threatening them. Her disability is prompted by poverty that is striking the family. This sinister image of a premeditated 'accident-gain' induces also a shock that shatters the boundaries of the familiar world to create a horror landscape.

Basically, the temporal setting of *Sula* covers a long period which extends to five decades (1919-1965). This setting begins in 1919, only one year after the end of the

World War One. The period covers the most horrific times that mankind had never experienced. For America where the novel is spatially set, in addition to these devastating wars, it also faced the political agitations of the Civil Rights movements that roughly started in the 1950s while the country was still bleeding of the aftermaths of the Second World War. The disabled bodies that Morrison brings in this novel are a fictionalised representation of the horrors and anxieties that the American society faced, particularly the African American community which experienced a double pain of racial exclusion and collective distress of poverty. This double alienation caused by racial discrimination and poor economic conditions hardened the existence of black people. Morrison portrays the harshness of this alienation through the disabled bodies of Shadrack and Eva. Being a victim of the World War One, Shadrack is neither assisted nor socially recognised by the white community for which he fought to preserve its security and economic interests. He has gone insane as a consequence of the horrors he experienced at battlefield. These horrors are exacerbated by the unacknowledged sacrifices he made at the price of the same community. Shadrack's insanity and impaled foot embody the socio-cultural alienation the black community experiences while Eva's lost leg personifies the miserable economic conditions of the black community. This disability embodies the economic alienation that has made dependent the lower class of black people.

Body and disability in Morrison's horror fiction are constant motifs in the narrative process of events. In these motifs, Morrison tries to highlight the common point that exists between disability, race and gender. In *Sula* as well as in other novels, black female characters are portrayed more vulnerable than their male counterparts: they are primary baits of the unrestrained sexism, racism and poverty. There is need to know

the role played by disability in order to understand how the several forms of alienation are interconnected.

In his explorations on the complexities of the disabled body in art and literature, Davis (1994) interprets disability as “the missing term in the race, class, gender triad” (p.104). Disability occurs when a norm has been violated. Indeed, the normal body loses its normalcy to become disabled after a strange situation has affected the legitimate state of the norm that was governing that body. Davis indicates, however, that once a norm appears, it creates confusion for the existing bodies that cannot conform to it. For the matter of tradition, Davis is laconic when he reiterates that “the concept of a norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm” (p.29). Every coercive law protects the privileges of its initiator and hypothecates the potential of the Other. Racism as well as patriarchy is a norm that is unilaterally instituted by the body in the position of power to curb the freedom of the minority or those outside power. Racism is a form of social disability that affects profoundly the socio-cultural existence of the black American minority. It disintegrates the social structure by creating a rift that sets the two communities each against the other. The presence of a racist ideology and a gendered mindset threatens the normalcy of a society.

In general, social oppression is observed as a common issue that the disabled share in many communities. Of course, alienation, in its various forms, is experienced differently by characters in Morrison’s novels. For instance, in many cases, men and women do not endure the same hardships either in nature or in origin. Individuals of different generations have issues of different nature; and characters of different classes and thereby different economic capabilities have equally different concerns

with regard to oppression even though all belong to the same community. In *Sula*, the major characters Nel Wright and Sula Peace endure alienation that is different from one another although both are females and have equal age. One struggles with the desire to achieve full motherhood while the other struggles to reject motherhood that she suspects enables men to subjugate women. Sula advocates an independent single life. This iconoclastic attitude of Sula toward marriage depicts Morrison's skepticism about the legitimacy of the phallogentric status in the American society. Talking with Mackay (ibid.), Morrison questions the American society why it continues to position man at the centre of family when several families are headed by single mothers (p.117).

In *Beloved*, female characters experience more sexual aggressions than men within the collective identity of slave. Almost all the female characters are molested by their masters: Sethe and her mother, Ella, Nan...are preys and sexual toys of the white masters. These sexual harassments introduce moments of uncanny experience: the frightening moments of gang molestations of the deported women while on sea and the sexual licentiousness in which fathers and sons share one sexual partner—as it is the case of the woman slave Ella—create an eerie atmosphere. Molestation sessions begin by the time the Middle Passage starts to continue more aggressively when survivors have reached America and are integrated into plantations. These molestations should not be understood as simple acts of sex or rape: not only are the victims caught and abused sexually against their will, but they are also used experimentally as guinea pigs. In some cases, perpetrators pretend to undertake research in which they collect elements that they would equate with animals' characteristics in order to wrongly prove that slaves—black race—are close to animals or just to affirm that blacks are animals. Morrison decries this human

wickedness in *Beloved*. By the time schoolteacher takes the responsibility to manage Sweet Home Plantations, he takes a cord, a pen and a record and sets to assemble what he pretends for him to be animalistic traits that he finds on his slaves. Schoolteacher is interested in the analysis of what he arrogantly qualifies as Sethe's anatomical and physiological traits that resemble animals' body (p.109). While they are ruthlessly whipping her, he cynically utters that black women do not feel pain just the same opinion of the white doctor who assisted Pauline Breedlove during childbirth.

Coming back to *Sula*, alienation based on dependency breaks the friendship of Sula and Nel; it transforms the old friends into sworn enemies. The enmity goes far to affect the old relationship of their families. Yet, what is hard to understand is that this friendship of the two women was founded on a communal partnership based on one another's moral and physical presence. Before they actually come to know one another, Nel and Sula "already made each other's acquaintance in the delirium of their noon dreams." They were solitary little girls whose loneliness was "so profound it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into Technicolored visions that always included a presence, a someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream" (p.51). The long lasting relationship that comes to its end tragically is a victim of a disconnection that first started from the misunderstanding between their families. The miscommunication of each which generates the loneliness of the other emanates from the "distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers" who make the situation bitter (p.52). Importantly to note, the Bottom is dominated by an indigent population of orphans and abandoned children due to various deaths and severe poverty that is striking the village. The adults who can be simulated to the disabled appear as a

category that is vulnerable as they worry how distant they are disconnected from the other physically able-bodied individuals of the town.

When Eva Peace has reached the advanced age of ninety, she becomes physically helpless and economically dependent as there is nothing she can do by her own. She feels disconnected from the Bottom—a community where she first grew as an ordinary woman; but later reached a reputable status of a competent and respectable matriarch. Eva has only one leg as she lost the other when it was cut off by a train. Now that her existence is gradually declining in its physical, social and economic dimensions due to old age, she is totally dependent on her granddaughter Sula who does not treat her appropriately. It is important to recall that Sula's character is indisputably rude: what makes great preoccupation for the girl is the uncontrolled dedication of her body into promiscuous miscegenation in the Bottom and Medallion; she cares less for the old mother who is now in a state of decay and in need of permanent assistance. The community considers Sula's miscegenation an act of abomination and an intolerable affront to their cultural values. Victim of her disabled body that has turned her physically incapable, Eva now has to be admitted to a nursing home for elderly people upon Sula's personal decision. There, the old mother will die only after some days. Sula sends her grandmother into the retirement home against the will of the community. Despite the brunt of multiple voices that condemn her to take the mother to that house, she refuses to give in. Eva's final alienation that brings total decline is grounded in the double-disabled state of her waning body as she can no longer live by her own to decide by herself. She has to accept the fate as it happens. The loss of her body's normalcy obliterates her existence and precipitates her death. Psychologically, she feels offended to be rejected by her granddaughter for whom she sacrificed her leg. The lack of recognition from the people whom she

sacrificed her life troubles the woman. This rejection accelerates the senile dementia which disconnects Eva from the world around her.

In this novel, Morrison provides acute situations and incidents that echo uncanny moments to portray the plight of the African American existence. The shameful fornication of Sula with the husband of her friend Nel overshadows the long companionship that had characterised the two girls since infancy. This incident impacts also on the old social relations of their families. In addition, the growing poverty that forces Eva to get deliberately her leg amputated induces a feeling of terror that underlies an uncanny landscape to portray the grief of black existence in the Bottom. This intentional disability which can be understood as an act of self-mutilation is also observed from Sula who unemotionally cuts off a tip of her finger to terrify the white boys who would like to harass her and her friends (p.69). These tragic and sacrificial acts reveal an abject state of extreme distress and anxiety mixed with despair that characterise the African American existence. Most touchingly, the neglect of Eva by her granddaughter Sula despite the sacrifices she made to feed her—a betrayal that triggers the painful decline of the matriarch—rouses a feeling of dejection that angers the community which later decides to expel Sula now declared a social pariah. All these uncanny incidents mirror the socio-cultural and economic instability that the black community faces in its struggle to locate itself within the boundaries of American society.

Long ago before she became physically inapt, Eva together with her daughter Hannah and Shadrack gradually lost their sense of being. This started from the time when they realised how they had been isolated in the society on the basis of race, class and health. Initially, it is important to remark that Eva's alienation has no connection with

the physical impairment of her missing leg though this disability may have exacerbated her plight. Rather, the missing leg had raised the matriarch to a state of considerable social reputation. Her decline is basically caused by the physical incapacity prompted by old age and the subsequent degenerative health that have transformed the woman into a permanently infirm and needy person. More painful and psychologically distressing, Eva dies unreconciled with her husband BoyBoy. On her deathbed agonising, she curses him to have left her; she is broken-hearted to die unaccompanied and socially unassisted. She “cursed him every day for thirty-seven years thereafter and would have cursed him for the rest of her life except by then she was already ninety years old and forgot things” (p.77). This curse directed to the one she used to love and share the same pain of racism and poverty attests Eva’s tragedy of a disconnected existence that affects her ego. She is disconnected both from within and from without: Eva has been living with her husband BoyBoy for many years as a household sharing the bitter socio-economic challenges of the Bottom. In her musings, she would be confident that her family worries were also part of her husband’s preoccupations. Living as a family, one would assist the other both socially and economically to cope with the prevalent challenges. The unexpected rupture with a husband who leaves her the burden to support the family needs breaks the woman’s heart: the love she reserved for him transforms into grief and hate that permanently hurt the woman. This painful disconnection from her husband is at the centre of Eva’s total decline.

Morrison deploys the disabled body in her fiction to depict the pathetic living conditions of the black community. Among the characters the writer creates, there is no white character who presents externally a bodily disability either physical or mental. All the perceptible cases of disability are found with black characters that are

portrayed facing very critical circumstances. However, Morrison represents the disability of white characters in another form: the extreme brutality that features the behaviour and actions of these characters depicts a disabled mind responsible for the evil acts that generate social destruction. This disability converts its subjects into blind individuals as they become themselves victims of their own folly in the long run. The case of schoolteacher's disabled mind observed through his violent nature is indicative: it endangers the credit that Mr. Garner and his wife had established in their estate and ruins the potentialities of Sweet Home.

The writer's portrayal of the disabled black characters places the latter into different layers of society: Milkman, with his petering leg, is a young boy born in a wealthy middle class family; Shadrack and Hagar who grow insane are young people as well while Pilate, Eva and Pauline are old women. This shows that alienation in the black community spares nobody no matter the age, class or gender. Significantly, Morrison's imagination of a predominance of disabled black characters suggests the absolute tragedy the African American community is experiencing. Normalcy which would personify an inclusive and peaceful society is under threat by the individual in possession of power. The misconception of this authority, which results in the abuse of the common man, cripples the potential of the society to progress. This uncanny crippling state that perverts the development of the community basically targets the African American existence. Morrison reveals the effects of this alienation through a metaphorical design of disabilities that generally strike the physical and mental body of black characters. Hence, the introduction of disabilities in character construction in the narratives suggests the existence of destructive forces that the black community has to resist as a body to defeat alienation and thereby achieve self-determination.

4.4 Fate and Alienation

Death in *Sula* as well as in other works by Morrison occurs at sporadic times but in a certain organised way. Harris (2009) observes that “in almost every one of the years Morrison pauses upon in *Sula*, a death occurs,” and in most cases, such deaths “are violent” (p.79). Though violence abounds in her writing, the large number of these deaths occurs accidentally and in peaceful circumstances. There are many uncanny moments that take place within unexpected circumstances: horrendous events unfold in peaceful times to disrupt the existing social order. For instance, in *Sula*, the death of Chicken Little occurs when Sula and Nel are playing near a river having the little boy at the centre of the game. The two girls have no malicious intention to harm the boy who accidentally falls in the river; he drowns when Sula loses grip with the boy while teasing him

The two girls were delighted. Wind hurled and the waters were calm. Chicken Little ran all sides, happy turning around and around the girls. In the middle of the girls and tightly hand in hand with Sula, the tad forgot the place by ecstasy. Sula, unconsciously lost the boy’s grip. She rudely fell on the bank while the boy dropped into the waters disappearing in a while to be seen the next days dead (p.69).

Sula’s mother, Hannah, dies of fires that fatally destroy her. These flames happen unexpectedly and mysteriously; they do not emanate from a criminal act. In fact, they appear from nowhere and burn Hannah to death while asleep. The deadly live burning that takes Hannah’s life in serene conditions triggers an uncanny incident that generates horror and which affects her mother’s psyche. This uncanny incident manifests itself in form of a *doppelganger*: before Hannah literally catches fires that destroy her to death, she has had, while asleep, a terrible dream in form of a vision of a red gown that she was wearing. From outside the house, “Sula saw her mother’s dress catch fire...getting red, red and never to stop. Fighting alone, unable to end the flames, fire tore Hannah fatally, her daughter watching. Her dreams of red gown

foregrounded death” (p. 43). The nightmare becomes a reality. However, though she dies violently, her death is totally accidental and happens in quiet moments.

The same uncanny experience occurs with the Bottom protesters. When the black workers of the Bottom are denied jobs in the construction of the New River Road, they assault the tunnel. While attempting to destroy the edifice, it collapses over the demonstrators whom many get buried alive. Next to this tragedy that hits the Bottom in its kernel, the deliberate murder of Plum by his mother Eva occurs in peaceful conditions as well. There is no conflict between Eva and her son either in the past or in the present. Yet, with hot oil, Eva storms Plum who is sitting quietly knowing nothing about his mother’s evil plans; and he dies tragically. These two deaths are ghastly in nature: the reader experiences a frightening and distressful feeling that turns him into an empathetic individual in a passion to seek justice for the victims.

All these instances of fatality are some of Morrison’s deaths vividly represented in *Sula*; they portray the characters’ agonising states that happen in peaceful circumstances. However, they are tragic in nature. The permanent hovering of deaths creates tension in the psyche of characters who consider life as transient and consequently frivolous. It is this frivolity of life that prompts Eva to immolate her son Plum (p.71). In a way to protect themselves against the unseen, characters try to take precautionary measures that would assist them to surmount the dangers to which they are permanently exposed.

Basically, this state of affairs embarrasses those characters whose main preoccupation is to see the social conditions improve. The embarrassment is observed from the way they organise household activities: husband and wife on one side and parents and children on the other side suspect each another; there is a crisis of confidence in the

community. Freud's *Heimlich* state which establishes an adequate connectedness between characters leaves space to the *Unheimlich*—a situation of confusion that initiates chaos which exteriorises itself into disconnectedness between characters supposed to share the same pain—yet they destroy themselves deliberately. The uncanny incident that portrays Eva destroying her son Plum exemplifies this situation of disconnectedness caused by an immense grief that she suffers as a mother to see her son painfully degenerate indefinitely. Plum's degenerative health exhumes the buried hardships his mother spent for many years over him from infancy till maturity; her possessiveness also reminds the mother of the bygone prowess of her son that had qualified him to join War in the hope to liberate society, his family and himself but ends up pitiable and dependent. This situation heightens Eva's distress who thereby decides to abridge the pain of her son by burning him to death.

Morrison exemplifies also the crisis of character disconnectedness which later results in a fateful alienation in *Song of Solomon*. Ruth Foster is a woman who was born in a rich middle class family of a black Doctor recognised to be the first black physician in the town. Having grown in a wealthy family, she could not imagine that one day she would experience a miserable life. Once she gets married, her conjugal life becomes miserable despite her husband is a wealthy man. Macon Jr. looks at his wife with scorn and regrets to have contracted marriage with her. He does not even conceal his malice from neighbours. For many years, Ruth Foster and her husband live separately under the same roof. The rejection by her own husband and the rude condemnation to a sexless marriage imprison Ruth who has to take refuge into the hands of her children and her sister-in-law, Pilate. She develops an abject state worsened by permanent loneliness. This abjection that she suffers freezes her conjugal life. Her conjugal happiness turns into a wasteland in which the husband suspects the wife and

vice-versa. Ruth is condemned to a miserable existence despite the abundant wealth in her home.

In *The Wounded Storyteller* (2002), Arthur Frank argues that an individual's moral embarrassment is a source of loss of control of one's body. Frank introduces the notion of the "unpredictable body" that he tries to define with regard to how the body [mind] tends to reject the threatening forces so as to create a soothing energy that "unites the body's aching parts". Unpredictability or "contingency" in Frank's terms has to be adapted in order to avoid "the body's condition of being subject to forces that cannot be controlled" (p.31). Frank's unpredictability is a result of abjection that perturbs the body's customary behaviour. In a situation of an abject state that Frank describes as contingency, the abject body needs a soothing force to keep its mental processes balanced. Otherwise, both the physical and mental dimensions of a body would shatter giving thereby way to ruin.

With regard to Frank's contingency, Morrison's representation of alienation is in some cases connected with unruly forces dictated by fate. There are three important sources of alienation that generate this unpredictable fate. The first source indicates the presence of a violent god that transforms Nature into the opposite of what it should really be; the second source shows the prevalence of racialism which crosscuts the plotlines of her novels; and finally, poverty is another source of vulnerability that sounds loud in her writing. All these forms of alienation have some common characteristics that render the writer's works one body. The overlapping effect creates a state of confusion that renders difficult the identification of the nature of an incident. A situation of such confusion can be observed from the tragic event in which a lot of demonstrators are killed when they start to destroy "the tunnel they were forbidden to

build” (*Sula*, p.161). Although the tunnel is built into strong materials, it easily collapses and buries alive the demonstrators. Significantly, that tragedy occurs when protesters engage the first attempt to destroy the edifice. In addition, the disaster happens when the community of the Bottom is celebrating the National Suicide Day initiated by Shadrack. Habitually, this day provides an important occasion for blacks to recollect on the painful past experiences. Equally, the traditional celebration of this Day brings the community together to reflect on the way forward to resist the white domination of Medallion. But at this time, the celebration of the day turns bitter with the massive losses of the Bottom’s inhabitants.

In all these macabre circumstances that happen to the workers, it is difficult to establish whether this cataclysm is naturally accidental or is imputed to the demonstrating angry workers. Of course, the main root of its cause is the racial exclusion that the protesters seek to decry. But next to this exclusion, there is also the issue of poverty that urges the jobless population of the Bottom to descend into streets. Racism and poverty thus overlap to trigger the distasteful fate of the miserable community. But beyond all, the existence of a god that has command over the universe and that handles nature in whatever way he decides can explain the sudden deaths of the poor demonstrators and the coincidence with the celebration of the National Suicide Day.

Whatever cause it may be, the violence created by the unexpected collapse of the tunnel weakens the resistance of the marginalised workers in search for social equity. It annihilates the active capacity of the Bottom toward common goal and weakens the hopes for victory. The attack of the tunnel was in fact an expression of protest against the discriminatory structure of Medallion. They die while decrying the white man’s

corrupt mind which antagonises the Bottom and Medallion to turn the inhabitants of the two communities into sworn rivals.

Ledbetter (2008) holds that violence does not absolutely imply death but may also have a role in the identity formation

Characters see and understand themselves and the world most profoundly when in the grip of terror. Using tradition, apocalyptic language, the restoration of the self develops through a spiritual journey that involves violence and chaos which takes characters to the extremes of human endurance and, in turn, allows, even forces self-discovery (pp.37-38).

The painful challenges that characters face, provide them the necessary awareness about what the world reserves for the future. This knowledge illuminates the path that they shall take on the journey to selfhood. It is this enlightenment that urges the demonstrators to react violently despite their weaknesses and the unpredictable fate.

In many cases, the permanent alienation generates confusion that worsens the degenerative human existence. Guitar Bains in *Song of Solomon* is an appropriate example: after he fails to obtain gold from Pilate's house, he surrenders to the whims of an unrestrained hatred that drives him to murder his friend Milkman. Kristeva's approach to abjection holds that "there is a zone of disgust inside all of us where the place of otherness resides; this zone is the abject and it is foundational to the self" (p.38). Guitar thinks that if he obtains gold, he will get money that shall enable him to organise and carry out his missions in the Seven Days organisation. Once Milkman informs him that in Virginia there was no gold as there wasn't any in Pilate's home, Guitar disbelieves him (p.197). Under the pressure of his 'zone of disgust' that has corrupted his mind, he schemes to murder Milkman whom Guitar suspects to have cheated him over the share. Mistakenly, he kills Pilate as the bullet intended for Milkman misses him and hits the lady (pp. 339-340). The hatred rooted in an abject

otherness intensifies Guitar's suspicion of his friend and drives him to eliminate Milkman. The abject obsession in money disconnects Guitar from his friend and becomes a prisoner of himself. Under the weight of his 'zone of disgust', he fails to dissociate the collective concerns he suffers with other blacks from the individual discord he has with his fellow blacks.

In Morrison's novels, violence itself is not as destructive as the characters' reactions against it. The heating turmoil of the circumstances engenders a cacophonous climate that forces characters to take either the appropriate or inappropriate positions to safeguard their assets or to protect the socio-cultural and economic patrimony of the community. In some instances, the distancing space between characters widens while it peters out in others to give room to social rapprochement. In *Sula* for instance, Nel feels concerned about the behaviour of her mother Helene who grows servile any time an issue rises between her and the whites. She feels ashamed of her blackness even when she is not offensively addressed. She is always frightened by the white presence and cannot hold a discussion with them even when she is certain her opinion is right. This behaviour is also observed from BoyBoy, Jude and some other male characters who naively escape the social duties they are supposed to fulfil: they abandon their families. Such characters appear childlike in many cases, physically and economically incapable to maintain the management of their homes and their own bodies.

We have already mentioned that when Plum returns home from war, he has become a drug addict whose mental and physical health is waning. The overconsumption of drugs has destroyed his body to the point that he can no longer walk; with the impacted bowels, he crawls like a baby—a situation that his mother Eva cannot stand. He has also developed a mental defect that has seriously impacted on the reasoning

ability. Morrison stigmatises the atrocities of wars that have messed up the foundations of the American society in general and alienated the prospect of the African American community in particular. The writer indicates that a war not only destroys a community substantially, but it also ruins the traditional values that construct the foundations of a society. Both Shadrack and Plum were young boys when they went to war. They were part of the active population to uplift the community's welfare. Yet, after the tragic devastations of war, they were considerably shattered to return home mentally disturbed, physically dilapidated and wholly dependent.

Morrison creates a contrast of a wife and a husband overcome by alienation. While BoyBoy Peace comes back in the Bottom to visit his former wife Eva, he boasts to her that he has acquired much wealth. Eva does not consider BoyBoy's pretensions. She discards her former husband's affectations of powerful and assiduous man. She remarks that BoyBoy has remained childish but only has acquired some skill to reorganise his future (p.97). Jude Greene enacts the similar ridiculous behaviour; he contracts a marriage without inner commitment as he seeks to conceal the economic embarrassment and the cultural alienation he is running (p.71). He does not marry out of love; he marries in the hope to get uplifted by his wife through a marriage that he himself challenges. Morrison highlights the indigent state of the character: Jude "needed someone to care about his hurt, to care very deeply...And if he were to be a man, he needed someone who could be more than his mother" (p.82). Jude is disconnected from his wife Nel and the Bottom in whole. Being naturally alienated by the white man of Medallion, he afterwards alienates his wife and shatters the family potential to secure a place in the community. Together with BoyBoy, they condemn themselves and ruin their social status of father and head of family. The weaknesses

of these characters are intensified by an alienated existence they experience. In the beginning, the immaturity of these characters affects much their families: Eva becomes unable to get the primary needs for the family like food; she curses him for the economic embarrassment in which he plunged the family. She feels embarrassed to hear his voice when he returns home boasting about his prowess of success out of the family he has destroyed. It is the similar dejection that Nel experiences when her husband Jude returns home in total shame. Eva and BoyBoy are as much disconnected as Nel and Jude are. Their lives cannot have a meeting point because of the socio-cultural and economic alienation that has shattered the epicentre of their existence.

Arthur Frank associates *Sula*'s characters with their struggle of "placing one's self and body within the 'community of pain'" (ibid. p.37). There is a widening gap between characters that are normally expected to develop closeness to defeat the common challenge. The misunderstanding between these characters strengthens the white man's capacities to reinforce his dominant power. Obviously, the disintegration from within that erupts into the black community of the Bottom enables the white community of Medallion to subjugate them unprecedentedly as the power to defend their community dissolves.

4.5 Disconnectedness and the Dichotomy 'Normalcy-Disablement'

From the start, this Chapter explores the meaning, the function and the relation existing between disability, disconnectedness and alienation in Morrison's horror novels. The basic understanding of 'disability' suggests to the reader to identify with the opposite concept of 'normalcy'. A quick view to the understanding of 'normal' body entails the meaning of completeness, autonomy, capability and self-sufficiency while 'disabled' body would entail incomplete, needy, inadequate, deficient and in

most cases, dependent (Thomson, 1997; Baker, 2009). In connection with Morrison's literary art, the binary 'disability-normalcy' embodies respectively the 'black-white' binary in which the former seeks to subvert the latter while the latter seeks to maintain his power. There is a permanent tussle that results in social disintegration and which endangers the lives of both communities with a deeper impact on the black community. The difference between the two bodies, however, remains ambiguous. In some cases, it is influenced by individuals' perception or by society's principles.

At the core of the disabled body in Morrison's fiction, there is disconnectedness that initially informs the reader about the existence of various forms of inequalities that are shaking the society. Speaking on the disabled body in literature, Fries (2000) holds that both disability and normalcy of the human body link the reader to the important concerns of human existence

If asked what, beside the fact that all the work in *Staring Back* has been written by a writer who lives with a disability and that I chose each piece first and foremost for its literary merit, bind together this work, I must reply it is the theme of human connection—connection with the past, connection one another, connection with our bodies, connection with ourselves (p.3).

Sula is an outstanding model of this connection. The relation that links the black community to the Bottom village and the white community to Medallion village emphasizes an existence of close connection between an individual and the environment to which he belongs. The permanent interaction between these entities makes each dependent on the other. The friendship between Sethe and Paul D in *Beloved* and the old companionship of Nel and Sula in *Sula* suggest the utility of human connectedness in the construction of a viable society. Sethe's 'marked' back in form of a chokecherry tree is a symbol that connects her self to the memories of the past with all its painful horrors. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's faltering leg which peters out day after day suggests the boy's social alienation although the community

believes he is a sated child born in a wealthy family. He has grown isolated amid the family in which he himself decides to deliberately cut all the social ties with the members. The petering leg embodies Milkman's growing anxiety and loneliness coupled with the subsequent dilemma that imprisons him into a world of uncertainty. These moments of Sethe's deformed back and Milkman's abnormal leg introduce uncanny experiences that portray the pain of these characters. These images produce a shocking perception that induces a feeling of fear and sorrow. Paul D falls dumbstruck the first day he comes across Sethe's torn back (*Beloved*, p. 117). Milkman's puzzling leg echoes the threat of social incompleteness that alienates his existence from parents, sisters and neighbours while the shock generated by Sethe's back personifies human wickedness.

4.6 Conclusion

This Chapter examined Morrison's representation of alienation of the American society. It has looked at the role colour in America plays to determine an individual's social status. The analysis found out that colour is an important stereotypical factor that dictates either the inferiority or superiority of an individual; this stereotype revitalises the white aristocracy while it weakens the deprived black community. The chauvinistic racialist ideology corrodes the white culture's mindset to believe in an authoritarian power that they think they are inherently born with to suppress the African American existence. It is this wrong conviction of the white folk which reinforces social alienation that strikes much the Africa American community. To expose the dangers of social disintegration brought by alienation, the writer has applied, among other images, the disabled and the marked bodies which epitomise the pain of exclusion in a cosmopolitan society. Horrifying physical disabilities and

unusual cases of corporeal 'markedness' in various forms are deployed in the texts to personify the various forms of cruelty of the white man against black people.

It has been discovered that alienation reveals a double effect in Morrison's writing: on one hand and most importantly, the study found out that alienation is a product of the horrifying living conditions that happen independently of the characters' will and that they try to resist painfully. On the other hand and most affectingly, it was noticed that the effects of alienation do not solely originate from the white man's malice: they also emanate from the black man's own choices to fulfil his egotistical drives. The case of Macon Jr. who preys on his family and more achingly on his wife Ruth Foster is very indicative at this point. Eva's abandonment by her husband BoyBoy and Nel's betrayal by her husband Jude Greene who flirts and later elopes with Sula are also other crucial cases that attest the existence of black destruction from within. The existence of an inner alienation of the black community based on an internal self-centred oppression rooted in the phallogentric structure worsens the black human condition which is already on the verge of collapse. This situation embarrasses the writer whose essential preoccupations aim at living a free and self-determining African America. The study also observed a horrific representation of victims of different generations, class and gender both suffering the same evils of racial alienation. This representation suggests that racism is a contagious disease that spares nobody and which can destroy the entire humanity no matter the colour, class, age or gender. While the writer pleads for the blacks, she also condemns their inaction et self-destruction that she suspects fortify the white man to permeate and sabotage the foundations of the African American heritage.

CHAPTER FIVE
TIME AND SPACE IN THE REPRESENTATION OF
A FRAGMENTED SELF

5.1 Introduction

The physical and temporal backdrops in a work of fiction play an essential role in the choice and design of a narrative's incidents and in the delineation of the issues that the work discusses. Setting and content are inseparable components in fiction as the former gives meaning to the latter. Morrison's choice of spatial and temporal dynamics reveals an existence of connectedness between characters' experiences and the environment which shapes their lives. This Chapter explores the way Morrison creates and constructs spatial and temporal settings in the texts to reflect the socio-cultural concerns of black people in America. Being essential elements in the creation of horror scenery, these two elements play an important role in the depiction of the painful experiences that black people endured in the past and still do in the present.

Upon numerous experiences that the human body undergoes, Edward Casey suggests that the same body produces place out of space. The critic notes that "body and place mutually constitute each other" (qtd. in Hönninghausen, 2005, p. 46). This assertion suggests that an individual's experience of a given environment keeps changing whenever body and mind experience new forms of violence, oppression or elation. Being a member of the oppressed community, Morrison's conception of space, time and place brings the reader to observe a link that connects the characters' actions to the physical and temporal environments. The natural landscapes together with time distribution in her texts do not serve only as setting elements that play the ordinary role to accommodate the occurrence of the narratives' incidents: in many cases, they

indicate the characters' predicaments with a clear emphasis on the social and political challenges that instigate the agony they face. Within this perspective, time and space become important artistic aspects in the study of human experiences.

Like Casey, Heidegger (2002) considers time, space and place in the setting process of a work as leading features to identify the roots of an individual's experiences. In his observation, "'place' places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time discloses the depths of his freedom and reality" (p.96). Both time and space generate a social status for characters to locate themselves within the boundaries of the community. Upon human experiences such as homesickness felt by little children for the loss of familiar places, the need for security and protection for every human caught in a strange place is a common fact. Each individual develops a certain ability to protect and consolidate one's space against an eventual invasion from external forces. Beside the functional role of depicting human concerns that Morrison's locales reveal, the same places indicate an ontological significance: they describe in detail the nature of being, the mode of existence that typifies the society at a particular time.

Space and time in art or in a literally socio-cultural existence of a community are usually linked to human sensibility that shows the society's challenges to understand its past and present, its pain and happiness or its success and failure in an evolutionary process. Time and space need to be understood through the context of social practices and material organisation to represent human experiences. Benesch (2005) explicates this position

The conception of time and space in a socio-cultural world gives assurance and knowledge to all humans to detect the real humanity they are building and to identify what constituted the past identity of the ancestry. Time and space provide a way to view the objective fundamentals of human existence rooted into the material conditions and social practices that determine every community. Put another way, under changed economic and technological conditions, definitions of time and space change accordingly to paint the evolutionary progress of humanity (p.18).

This view on spatial and temporal conception by Benesch couples with Morrison's strategies in the creation of physical and temporal locales in her novels. The fictional places that dominate her texts trace the characters' miserable existence in a world where they have to struggle in order to get a place. This time and space construction projects an exposition of the socio-cultural mindsets that stunt social cohesion between black and white communities. For instance, houses, homes and selected significant periods depicted in her works play a particular importance as they are landmark points from which the journey to life starts and in most cases the place where the same journey ends. In *Beloved*, for instance, Sethe's journey to freedom starts from Sweet Home which is both her professional and social home. This journey ends in another home—124 Bluestone—in a socio-historical context different from the time when she started the journey. This journey traces a mixture of historical traumas and joys experienced in both places; it constitutes the warehouse of the protagonist's permanent memories.

In his work *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gaston Bachelard states that 'house' in its social context of home is a place of paramount importance for an individual's existence. It "is the human being's first world by the time he detaches from the bio-maternal dependency, just before he is cast into the world. Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house" (p.32). Sethe's peaceful stay of twenty-eight days in Baby Suggs's house corresponds to this intimacy and freedom

provided by a home. Freud (1919) argues that an individual's mind acts as a 'secret place'—just like a home—to house an individual's conscious and unconscious processes (p. 203). Sethe experiences a blissful time from a true home that she has never experienced before. Amid her four children and her mother-in-law Baby Suggs around, Sethe feels comfortable and psychologically relieved after many years of bondage. 124 House becomes more than a home; Sethe beholds life in the house and idealises the place as a paradise that is going to soothe her long-scarred self. In this short moment she spends in 124, she forgets all the misfortunes she went through in Sweet Home. She decides to undertake a new existence in the new home; even the pain of loss of her husband Halle gradually vanishes. This ataractic feeling from a home that soothes the wounded hearts grants Eva Peace a respectable status in the Bottom by the time her husband leaves; she starts experiencing the pleasure of a home when BoyBoy deserts her as she later secures financial means to maintain family needs and live independently in her house (*Sula*, 66 ff.). The absence of her husband in the family transforms the former agitated home into a peaceful house that heals Eva's injuries.

This anthropological sense of home is a common leitmotif in the novels of Morrison. Of course, all physical places of the writer's settings do not relate to the concept of home. There are incidents that are set in places distant from home. For instance, some events unfold in terrible places such as cemeteries, wilderness, rivers, prisons, at sea...Nel's visit to Sula's tomb (*Sula*, 103 ff.) and Crawling-already? girl's burial (*Beloved*, 69 ff.) are sinister places that reflect awe and fear to the reader. The sexual harassments of which Nan, Sethe's mother and other women slaves are victims do not occur in a home: these women are abused at sea on the slave ship to America. Such places create a gloomy atmosphere in the texts and in the mind of the reader. From the

physical dimension they bear, they bring in a psychologically horrifying representation that embodies the chaotic world of the African American existence within what Morrison calls “the self-condemning and declining America.” (Mackay, p.134)

Morrison considers home as the centre of human existence: it is the place where life starts and grows to maturity before it declines. Once home is violated, life loses meaning. By the time Sethe’s home is invaded by schoolteacher’s posse, her body and soul disintegrate. Once Freud’s ‘secrecy’ of home is violated, she loses temper and commits an irreparable crime as she struggles to keep her home safe. That home be converted into a site of oppression is what Morrison ultimately contests in her fiction. This conception of home is also espoused by Harvey (2011) who posits that “transformations of space, place, and environment cannot remain neutral before external aggressions play the role of counterbalancing the practices of domination and control” (p.47). The aggression of home is an affront to an individual’s humanity.

Space, time and place are, in many cases, represented as metonymies of the oppressive cultural systems that control and abate the characters’ journey to freedom; and Morrison’s protagonists are the main victims to fall: Sethe, Sula, Pecola, Milkman Dead and Heed experience harsh challenges from the nuclear family or the cultural structures to which they belong. They have to struggle in order to surmount those hurdles for fear that they perish once defeated.

This Chapter examines the choice, the role and function of time and space in Morrison’s fiction with regard to horror. It analyses how the writer’s setting landscape captures the concept of ‘home’ which dominates her discourse. Place, understood as a social or cultural status that each character struggles to secure in a community is

conditioned by the spatial and temporal predispositions that Morrison introduces in her writing. Therefore, the study explores also the interplay between time, space and 'place'. The Chapter also looks at how the material deployed to reinforce both the geographical and the temporal landscapes personify the social conditions of the characters' lives. As the Chapter interrogates the interconnection existing between character and environment, the analysis follows the psychoanalytic processes of Abjection and The Uncanny advanced by Kristeva (ibid.) and Freud (ibid.) to understand the influence of the environment on human mind. In the end, the study demonstrates how Morrison's setting design mirrors the fragmented self of the black community that the writer struggles to uphold.

5.2 Reading Places: The Dialectic of Socio-Cultural Context of Place and Space

5.2.1 *Beloved's* spatial and temporal landscape

5.2.1.1 Relating history, time and space with human existence

History and geography play an important role in *Beloved*. Morrison builds a text in which spaces play a major function in the portrayal of the pain of racial marginalisation. Throughout the development of the narrative, there are several locations, time indications and significant dates that have distinctive identities as cultural, social or historical sites destined to welcome various incidents in relation with the oppressive treatments to which characters are tied. *Beloved's* narrative is dominated by a landscape of domestic as well as public places, mountains, plantations of various kinds, rivers, prisons, churches, etc. This diversity in locales corresponds to the diverse horrors that slaves face on their journey to freedom. These locales are not simple places that permit the incidents to unfold: in them, they carry some sense of historicity and culture that link them to characters. Morrison's chosen locations work as signifiers that have particular referents in the historical pasts of Africa and

America. In the numerous struggles that the characters engage, they seek to get a place, a 'home' where they would feel comfortable. The lack of home abates them and exacerbates the identity of outsiders of which they are victims.

Casey (1993) deplores this state of homelessness. In his observation, "to lack a primal place is to be 'homeless' indeed, not only in the literal sense of having no permanent sheltering structure but also as being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world" (pp. xiv-xv). *Beloved's* characters are found undertaking long and difficult journeys that bring them back to the past; this journey creates new awareness for the characters who end up by discovering a home in the present. After the unspeakable tragedy that Sethe experiences in Sweet Home and in 124 Bluestone, the novel closes with a sign of victory for her as the ghost has been exorcised and is gone forever, "By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there" (p.275). She now starts to think about her present with Paul D who proposes her to start a family and have a baby. The Cincinnati she lives in today is a place different from the Cincinnati she lived in for many years while she was under threat of the ghost and the community. In addition, the 124 household she leads today with full authority as a matriarch is a home which is different from the 124 home she lived in with her children and Baby Suggs eighteen years ago. While crafting the locales, Morrison shows the importance of place and person in the advancement of the debased African American culture. Dixon (1987) deduces an existence of an important link that connects a person to the place and a place to a person in the revalorisation and defence of cultural heritage

We see the author who enlarges and completes many previous attempts to show the importance of both place and person in the development of Afro-American culture. Attentive to the physical and cultural geography of the small black towns that shaped her and her characters, Morrison constructs familiar yet new dialectical oppositions between enclosed and open spaces, between the fluid horizontality of neighborhoods (shifting, migrating populations, a profusion of character types and changing morals) and the fixed verticality, hence presumed stability of the house (p.147).

Geographical locations like cities, rivers, streets and the social places such as home, neighbourhoods, churches...are represented with minimal attributes that transform the customary identity of these places into new spaces to provide new feeling. In many cases, these places reveal the psychological tension of characters and how they struggle to resist humiliation in an attempt to claim an acknowledged 'place' in the society. This intricate choice of physical locations becomes more informative: the selected places stand as metaphors for individuals' peculiar challenges on one side and as metaphors for collective predicament to represent the society's communal challenges on the other side. Pecola's lust for 'blue eyes' in *The Bluest Eye*, for instance, mirrors issues that discomfit an individual in their private existence while the denial of jobs to black workers in *Sula* indicates a collective challenge of racial exclusion that unsettles the collective social order. Conversing with Stepto (1994), Morrison explicates her choice of space and 'place' by giving an example of the relation that binds a woman to a place where she belongs either by birth or by marriage

I think some of it is just a woman's strong sense of being in a room, a place, or a house. Sometimes my relationship to things in a house would be a little different from, say my brother's or father's or my sons'. I clean them and I do very intimate things 'in place': I am sort of rooted in it, so that writing about being in a room looking out, or being in a world looking out, or living in a small definite place, is probably very common among most women to feel homemaker both as a daughter or wife anyway (p.11).

An exploration of the novel's spatial setting shows that the South bears the largest structure of the setting landscape and has an acute influence on the other places that the narrative gradually unfolds through its different stages. Kennedy (2000) affirms that "the South often plays an important role as an imaginary home place in African-American literature with a primary Northern urban setting" (p.58). Although the South in the memory of the slaves reminds them of the calvary and humiliation they experienced, it does not represent Morrison's total rejection. Without ignoring the horrors this place inflicted on the deprived slaves, the writer paints nostalgia for the South which was the historical birthplace for a number of the franchised slaves. For Sethe and Paul D, the South still stands as the cradle for humanity despite the white man's denial. Amiri Baraka's *Blues People* (1963) reaffirms the existence of the pride of home that was still experienced by the migrated slaves due to the harshness of the region. Baraka observes how this ambivalence of home and hell creates nostalgia for the slaves who cannot forget their homeland despite the ignominious conditions they experienced there

But the sole idea was 'to move,' to split from the incredible fabric of guilt and servitude identified so graphically within the Negro consciousness as the white South. However, there was a paradox, even in the emotionalism of this reasoning. The South was *home*. It was the place that Negroes knew, and given the natural attachment of man to land, even loved. The North was to be beaten, there was room for attack. No such room had been possible in the South, but it was still to be called home (p.105).

The passion for the South that is depicted through flashbacks and memories is at the heart of the characters. Although the slaves try to escape the area because of its oppressive political system, they regret that there is a treasure they leave behind. Culturally, the South fostered the slaves and united their diverse fragmented African identities into a unique body. This unification became possible thanks to the collective cultural performances of the *negro-spirituals* and *blues*, the exchange of the

diversified folktales and the daily hard labor. In evenings, they could meet and sing these folklores which defined their newly acquired cultural identity. The spirituals assisted slaves to wrap the bleeding wounds by making them forget the pain they were enduring. Spirituals and blues soothed much the broken community. By crossing River Ohio to reach what they perceived as the “Promised Land” in the North (Gillespie, 2008, p. 113), they were leaving behind this historical and ancestral legacy that had characterised the slave communities for centuries. They felt culturally barren and socially disintegrated as the freed slaves had to live independently and scattered in many places of the North. The collective gatherings and communal sharing of those ancestral legacies that had epitomised their Southern life were lost. The freedom they acquired in the North ruined this cultural heritage and consequently they felt culturally barren and lonely.

In an interview with Mackay (*ibid.*), Morrison has herself declared that she was against the Blacks’ Civil Rights movement of the 1950s onward. Conscious of the predicament the African American community was facing, Morrison wished the two communities would remain ever separate as they had been before. She stated that she “was afraid the cultural heritage that the black Americans inherited and passed on generation after generation would disappear once America became culturally one” (Lister, 2009, p. 89). For the writer, the cultural merging would threaten the long-established identity that has characterised black existence

The black has remained distinctive amid the oceans that surrounded him for centuries. This distinctiveness has been favored by the polar existence that placed whites on a side and blacks on the other. If we really want to become a single community of Americans, the minority will get engulfed and forgotten historically, culturally and ethnographically. We don’t wish this cataclysm to happen to us and to our future generations. To erase the footprints of our ancestors prejudices or hypothecates the African American existence in America which saw its days four centuries ago. Our best black universities that

give pride to the black presence in this nation, our cultural and traditional music and folklore rooted into the spirituals, the blues and the today's jazz, the Harlem Rebirth... would be lost. We need them around us to weave us and to remind us of our dear duties (Mackay, *ibid.*, p.143).

Morrison is not cynical about the evils of racial discrimination that were shaking the 1960s America despite the political declarations of abolition of slavery and discrimination that were decreed without noticeable effect. She felt disheartened that the historically cultural peculiarity of the black minority amid the white dominant culture would sink in. Morrison reveals this phobia of identity loss for the franchised slaves through a nostalgic dilemma that still haunts the freed blacks: they have geographically left the South because of its oppressive structure; but the black cultural legacy that the same South had imparted to the slaves cannot be forgotten or left behind. These immutable values haunt them. Paul D cannot forget the South. His memories are not exclusively oriented to the sufferings he endured there; they are also bound to the comradeship and the brotherly conversations he used to have with his fellow slaves; he wishes he met them once again in the South so as to resurrect the long-dead old coterie. Paul D reminds Sethe of how the bygone days they spent in the South were partly pleasant regarding the sorrow and solitude that shake 124, "Sethe, now the ghost off. This house has now a happy, pretty sight; but Sweet Home was better. Rest's come but you've no company. In Sweet Home, we had had plenty" (p. 269). This psychological journey back to the South which still disturbs Sethe and Paul D is a mental expedition that takes them back to the roots of their ancestors. Morrison indicates that man and home are intimately connected. Any attempt to detach him from the place results into an injury that is hard to cure. The South is still idealised by the freed slaves as motherland. Even though they leave it geographically, they are still bound to it psychologically.

Mulvey (1989) indicates that “the lost memory of the mother’s body is similar to other metaphors of a buried past or a lost history that contributes to the rhetoric of oppressed people” (p. 166). For the slave community, the South is perceived as the maternal womb that gave birth to the African American culture. It is the first home they came to know overseas after the loss of the original home (Africa). *Beloved* is temporally set in 1873, just two centuries and a half after the first slave reached America in 1619 (Gross, 2003, p. 68). Several generations of this community knew Africa by word as they found themselves born in America. In this context, these young generations consider the South as the motherland *per se* despite the mistreatments they face. The lost “friendly, intimate, homelike; the enjoyment of quiet content...arousing peaceful pleasure and security as in one within the four walls” of a home cannot be forgotten (Freud, *ibid.*, p. 197). Paul D, Sethe, Stamp Paid, Halle and other black characters in *Beloved* belong to these generations. Lonien (2009) ascertains that “if the characters in *Beloved* are motherless in the literal sense of the word, they are also motherless metaphorically, cut off from their traumatizing but also identity-forming roots in the South. Going back to the Southern roots is painful” (p. 34). Of course, it would be more painful for the freed slaves to return back body and soul in the South; all that they have to do is to stay permanently in the North and repress the Southern nostalgia of the lost civilisation. The incompleteness of the cultural integration in the North exhumes the pain of the denied love for their home that they had buried for years in their subconscious. This state torments the freed slaves who find themselves homeless in a cultural context.

Throughout *Beloved*’s narrative, Sethe’s mother, who remains unnamed, is an abstract character only known through the anecdotal fragments of Sethe and other female characters. By the time the novel opens in 1873, she has died long ago. Yet, she might

be assigned an important status as a character who gave life to the narrative's protagonist. Paradoxically, this mother is almost invisible in the life of her daughter Sethe even during their existence. She died early before Sethe reached maturity; even before her death, she rarely met her daughter because she was overworked and could not get time to entertain her daughter (p.118). In the same way, the South gives life and identity to the black slaves but they do not benefit from the opportunities given by the place. Like the painful agony that a child suffers when cut off from his mother, Morrison provides a similar metaphor which suggests that the disconnection of an individual from his motherland destroys both his physical and cultural existence. Keenan (1993) finds dreadful this spatial breakage between an individual and his milieu as it affects one's self

Beloved's narrative exposes with clarity that the ambiguities of connection and separation between the slave mother and child on one hand and between an individual and his home on the other hand bearing some correlation with the contradictions that mark the relationship of African Americans to their history. If, in psychoanalytic terms, the mother as source, or origin, is problematic and irrecoverable, so African Americans have learned through their particularly fractured past that history is problematic and often irrecoverable (p.57).

Like the irreplaceable mother in the nurturing of a child, Morrison suggests that home is an irreplaceable place in the cultivation of an individual. Any breach of home would result in the abatement of an individual's humanity. Home provides knowledge and significance for one's roots; this fact is thus indispensable for an appropriate growth of the African Americans.

5.2.1.2 Sethe's mystery and struggle for Sweet Home

Nostalgia that Su (2005) defines as "the longing to return to a lost place" is an important leitmotif that pervades *Beloved* (p.4). Many characters in the narrative manifest this psychological feeling which creates restlessness in the actions they

perform. Paul D, Sethe and Baby Suggs still idealise Sweet Home as a *home*; there is a certain connectedness that continues to link these characters to what they perceive as a lost domicile despite the horrors they endured during their time of enslavement. The deployment of nostalgia for lost places in the narrative serves to unearth the past in order to explain the challenges of the present that the former slaves face and to which they have to attempt to find a way out. This unfulfilled longing for a home results in a displacement of their selves that establishes a frightening uncanny experience as Freud (*ibid.*) indicates

This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some other effect...for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something that is familiar and old fashioned in the mind and which has become alienated from it through the process of repression (Qtd. Israeli, 2003, p.381).

The nostalgia revives the painful memories and unearths the repressed frustrations that drive the franchised slaves to suspect even the hospitality of the new home—the North. When they recollect how they lost their loved home because of human wickedness, a shock in form of grief transpierces their hearts. Baby Suggs's lamentations on the significance of colour in a multiracial society, Sethe's reasoning that has turned her maniac and Paul D's perpetual questioning of manhood indicate the shock of the shattered illusions to own a home.

The restless state of the protagonist exemplifies the rude consequences of a spatial lust: although the ghost has been driven out definitively, Sethe is unable to secure a home that would appease her mind. Her obsessive longing for Sweet Home opens the past wounds that had already cicatrised. She is unable to accommodate with the demands of the present which is always shattered by her sore recollections. This lack of harmony with the present reinforces the character's state of displaced identity and

homelessness as she actually belongs neither to Cincinnati (North) nor to Sweet Home (South) which expelled her long ago. She is wholly disconnected from the two homes. This displacement alienates her existence and destroys her “best thing” that would assure her and her daughter Denver the pride to live (*Beloved*, p.272). The passionate idealisation of Sweet Home fails to create for Sethe an adequate space to contain her ambitions for a new life that would place her into an accurate home located in the present. This mental journey that she and Paul D undertake towards the South brings them to rediscover the plantations of Sweet Home. As Freud mentions above, this place “is in reality nothing new or alien” because the two characters lived there together before they forcibly relocated to Cincinnati.

In the first stance, this locale ‘Sweet Home’ is depicted in the narrative as a paradisaic haven where slaves are fairly treated by a generous master, Mr. Garner. However, behind the generosity of Mr. Garner and his wife lies a monster—schoolteacher—that will not spare the lives of the unfortunate slaves in the coming days. In the beginning of the novel, this utopian view of ‘Sweet Home’ is eclipsed by a descriptive flashback of the tragic experiences that Sethe met in 124 Bluestone where she literally lives in the present. Either at home or at work, nightmarish recollections of Sweet Home revolve repeatedly in her mind taking her back to the milieu as the past place and the present time merge. The beauty of the lost place torments her

Suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forget her memory for that (p.6).

Sethe still remembers that in Sweet Home life was not easy. She cannot forget the atrocious lynching and hangings of which slaves were subjects. The ‘hell’ she lived in Sweet Home is now gone. This time, she is preoccupied with the contemplation of the ‘beautiful’ and ‘most wonderful’ vegetations of the place. Yet, she wishes she was there to take pleasure in the splendid landscape that this place offers to its inhabitants. What appears strange and quite hard to understand is that Sethe is more obsessed by Sweet Home’s beauty than her lost runaway sons: she herself feels ‘shamed’ to have more attachment to ‘the wonderful soughing trees’ of the area than to ‘the boys’—her sons, Howard and Burglar— whom she has no news for quite many years since they left 124 when the house was under Beloved’s threat.

There is a paradoxical element in Sethe’s thinking: how can she admire so blindly the beauty of the trees of a land that denied her and her fellows? The contrast that erupts between the ‘beauty’ and the ‘wonderfulness’ of the trees of Sweet Home on one side and the horrifying tragedies of lynching that marred the same place on the other side justifies Sethe’s ambiguous character. This mental haziness is prompted by a mentally abject state that controls her being for a long time and without hope to get out of it. This point marks the juncture of Kristeva’s abjection and Freud’s uncanny where the resurfaced deceptions denature and devastate profoundly an individual’s self to result in a psychological deviance if such deceptions do not meet an appropriate response to mitigate their effects. After the ominous attempt to ‘exterminate’ her progeny with the aim of ‘protection’, Sethe did not remain the same. Her mind which dictates her present way of life is blurred. She cannot decide the right side she belongs to and therefore tries to conceal the repressed horrors she still carries in her subconscious. Since the murder of her baby Beloved, she is under permanent ban that the community has imposed over her as a retribution for the crime she committed. From

this social proscription, she believes she would retreat to the South in Sweet Home to secure solace. Being rejected by individuals of her colour with whom they shared the bitter past of slavery, she feels that she is too hated to belong to Cincinnati. Her perception of this space bears a negative assessment; and she likens this social exclusion by her fellow former slaves to the white rejection she underwent in Sweet Home.

But, for Sethe, Sweet Home still has something superior in her existence: although Cincinnati (Ohio, North) welcomed her cheerfully with her children, she came to know the place through the pain of exile. It is not her real home. Kentucky (South), though it betrayed her humanity as a slave, is her birthplace. Before she became Cincinnati resident, she was Sweet Home citizen. The native identity of Sweet Home surpasses the acquired identity of Cincinnati irrespective of the socio-cultural considerations that distinguish the two homes. 124 Bluestone home is inefficient and does not give Sethe the necessary warmth that a woman in a home would need.

Lonien (ibid.) explicates

Sweet Home is the only “home” she has ever known, and as such it serves as the place of origin in which she locates her sense of identity. It also serves as the locus of a common past for Sethe, Baby Suggs and Paul D, and therefore is a vital point of reference in their common journey towards a retrieval of traumatic memory. When Paul D points out the irony in the naming of Sweet Home and thereby gently criticizes Sethe’s own nostalgia for the place, Sethe counters by claiming Sweet Home as their common ground, the place that they remember as home whether they want to or not (p.39).

Additionally, the novel’s narrative reinforces Sethe’s attachment to the lost ‘sweet home’; her disagreement with Paul D indicates, ““She’s right, Sethe. It wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home.’ He shook his head. ‘But it’s where we were,’ said Sethe. ‘All together. Comes back whether we want it or not’” (p. 15). In her meditation, Sethe understands how to make the right choice; this choice is motivated by a deep

nostalgia caused by a separation that cut her off from what she really felt intimately bound to. Paul D is certain that Sweet Home ‘wasn’t home’ but a ‘sweaty’ place of subjugation. However, when Sethe is invited to choose either Sweet Home or rather no place indeed, the woman deliberately chooses Sweet Home which stands as a momentous place in her existence. This choice revitalises Sethe and positions her at the center of the past and the present. She physically lives in Cincinnati as her present home but still culturally keeps an eye on Sweet Home as her past defining identity.

There are reasons that motivate Sethe’s thought and preference. In the narrative, the Garners who own Sweet Home at the time Sethe is their slave are depicted by Morrison as benefactors who treat kindly their slaves (p. 99). This couple even tries to make the slaves conscious that the plantations they neatened every day are their own property. While other masters call their slaves ‘beasts,’ Mr. Garner calls his with a formal way “men”; and his “men” feel much more invigorated, “Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of them. Bought em thataway, raised em thataway. Men every one” (*Beloved*, p. 11). He has bought them as men, raised them as men and wants that they should remain men in everything and everywhere. This philanthropic treatment by Mr. Garner and his wife makes the slaves feel more comfortable than other slaves in the South. They are sure Sweet Home is not really their home. But, at least they are treated as humans, a privilege that no other slave enjoys across the entire South. Within the boundaries of the Garners’ humane sense of life that has transformed his slaves into almost his own children, Sethe locates her self. But the language deployed by Morrison here indicates an existence of something under carpet. While deliberately writing ‘my *niggers is men*,’ the choice of a plural name ‘niggers’ that goes with a verb in singular ‘is’ proves that the Garners do not have

total trust and love in the slaves they hold. This stylistic discrepancy in language translates the couple's contempt and limited love toward the slaves.

In the life of slaves, the 'Black Codes' introduced by the Southern whites after the failure of the Reconstruction to curb the acquired rights of slaves prohibited official contracts of marriage among other rights. As slaves were not allowed to own anything, they were also forbidden to perform contractual marriage. Indeed, masters feared that if slaves were allowed legal marriage, they would claim ownership of their offspring born from such unions. Upon the pretext of unacknowledged marriage, the children born were not a property of the parents in the eyes of the white man. White masters would appropriate those children whenever they wanted. Paradoxically, Morrison portrays the compassionate Garners allowing Sethe and Halle to contract their marriage although the ceremony is not made public, eventually because the same Garners are afraid of the rage of the white neighborhood that would condemn them for law infringement and treason. To fully acknowledge Sethe and Halle's official marriage, Mrs. Garner crowns the couple with golden earrings that she cheerfully gives to Sethe (p.133). In addition, on the basis of Halle's extra work, the Garners deliberately decide to set free Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs as she has reached an advanced age becoming less fit for labor. After she is freed, they authorise and assist Baby Suggs to leave Sweet Home, Kentucky (South) and go to retire in the free-slave state of Ohio (North) that the Garners hope it will grant the old mother a peaceful and comforting retirement. All these philanthropic initiatives toward the slaves transform Sweet Home from a slave home into a familial household in which each individual feels comfortable. Sethe cannot forget these lost opportunities which had converted the place into an idealised Eden. They keep 'rolling before her eyes' exasperating her abject ego.

However, behind the philanthropic care of Mr. Garner looms the mischievous animosity of slavery that is targeting his ‘Sweet men’. For DeKoven (1995), the Garners’ “Utopia, however, is always already contaminated by slavery: even at their best, the slaves’ lives are only almost livable, and nothing like autonomous or free” (p. 79). Sweet Home’s concealed realities are discovered by the time Mr. Garner dies and quickly succeeded by his little brother schoolteacher in the management of the estate. Truth resurfaces through his blatant malice which converts the utopian Sweet Home into a pandemonium with an ironically ardent desire to “put things in order” (*Beloved*, p.10).

Subsequent to Mr. Garner’s death, the sickly widow Mrs. Garner becomes incapable to assure the management of the plantations. Her first weakness appears when she fails to liquidate the unpaid contracted debts left by her late husband (p.173); rather than find other possibilities that would not endanger the life of her loyal slaves, she deliberately sells Paul F—an act that her husband never did for fear that he would hurt his ‘men’. This act infuriates other slaves who start to question their ‘place’ inside Sweet Home. From the time, ‘the sweetness’ of the place dissolves.

Mrs. Garner, crying like a baby, had sold [Paul D’s] brother to pay off the debts that surfaced the minute she was widowed. Then schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe’s eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight (p. 10).

This trading of one of the Sweet Home ‘men’ marks the beginning phase of the collapse of Mr. Garner’s utopian promises that he had always kept for his slaves. What is more poignant is that Mr. Garner’s widow sells Paul F despite the caring treatment she knew her husband reserved to the slaves. This sale is a betrayal against

the late Mr. Garner's philanthropic compassion towards his 'men'. It shatters the illusionary love they have had toward Sweet Home and its magnificent plantations.

In the examination of the effects of abjection on a human mind, Kristeva (*ibid.*) holds that "the abject has the only one quality of the object; and that is being opposed to I" (p.1). The trading of Paul F convinces other slaves of the fragility of their lives. This savagely unbelievable act breaks the slaves' trust that they have had in the family for long. Their 'self'—theorised here by Kristeva as the "I"—melts as it capitulates before the coercive weight of the abject. They start to doubt the woman's dual identity that duplicates right after the death of her husband. When Mr. Garner was still alive, his wife never harmed the slaves: she was as generous as he. Mr. Garner himself had had financial issues in his daily dealings with the community. But he never dreamed to trade any of his slaves as a way to settle debts; he revered them as his own offspring and could not harm them. The advent of schoolteacher on the invitation of Mrs. Garner herself worsens the living conditions of the slaves in Sweet Home and breaks down the hopes for a peaceful place. Sethe's sexual assault by schoolteacher's nephews culminated by the brutal whippings that transform her back into a chokecherry tree and the robbery of her maternal milk justify the animosity of Sweet Home's new manager (p.23). Besides, the deliberate live burning of Sixo, the selling of Paul D and the dismemberment of Paul A by schoolteacher himself convince the slaves that Sweet Home is no longer a 'sweet' place but a hell. Pentony (1996) opines that once our body experiences the abject, we instantly fear and identify with it as the same body struggles to keep serene its disturbed balance (p.82). Subsequently, this cruelty which creates an abject state that prevails in the once peaceful Sweet Home forces the unfortunate slaves to flee the place. But, only is Sethe successful to run

away as others are intercepted and consequently sold, dismembered to death or burnt alive.

This portrayal of success and failure of Sweet Home that Morrison brings in is very suggestive. In Chapter One, we have seen that *Beloved* is historically and temporally set in 1873 during the Reconstruction in the period of post-American Civil War. The Reconstruction (1865-1877) was a socio-political and economic program initiated by the Union Government of America to rehabilitate the country particularly the South that had severely been destroyed by the Civil War (1861-1865) (Ortiz, 2005, 27 ff.). Morrison's representation of the failure of Mr. Garner's Sweet Home depicts the historical failure of the Reconstruction that brought shame to the freed slaves and the Union officials. Like the collapsed utopian Sweet Home, the Reconstruction failed to implement the civil and political rights that The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 and the consecutive Acts and Amendments had granted to the freed slaves.

The Emancipation Proclamation which was the first and fundamental law to free slaves did not actually free those slaves as it met a radical opposition to its application in the Southern states. Among the states that opposed the Emancipation, the fictional state of Kentucky in *Beloved*, in which Sweet Home is located, was included. This evidence suggests that Morrison's fiction joins history and society to represent the pain people experience through time. The failure of Sweet Home which was a powerfully well-organised farming family is very significant. The death of President Abraham Lincoln is also fictionalised through the death of Mr. Garner. Lincoln was a caring and compassionate president just as Morrison's fictional Mr. Garner is (Fountain, 2010, p.79). Sweet Home's decline starts from the time Mr. Garner dies.

Similarly, the death of President Lincoln weakened the American federation. It was after his death and particularly from the end of the misty Reconstruction that the defeated Southern states restarted to curb the already civil and political rights granted to the former slaves just as the fictional schoolteacher and his nephews in *Beloved* profit from the death of the head of Sweet Home plantations, Mr. Garner, to oppress Paul D, Sethe and the other slaves.

The Reconstruction brought almost no significant effect to the paper-freed slaves. The Thirteenth Amendment officially abolished slavery; but it was only abolished on paper. On the ground, slavery was still observed and even reinforced in some Southern states (Ortiz, *ibid.* p.112). The Fourteenth Amendment was destined to grant the freed slaves American citizenship; and the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution gave men the right to vote while the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was passed to ban racial discrimination that was observed in public spaces such as hospitals, schools, markets, stadiums...All these laws only existed on paper. They were never enforced. They made no significant effect in the improvement of slaves' existence. In fact, by the time the Union forces left the South in 1877, the Southern states legislatures quickly started to pass the 'Black Codes' that restricted the rights Blacks had already acquired (Blackburn, 1988, p.268). This historical nullification of the acquired rights is depicted through Morrison's fictional schoolteacher who suppresses the rights and freedoms of Sweet Home that slaves had acquired from Mr. Garner. The slaves' disappointments portrayed in *Beloved* depict or simply parallel the historical disappointments that slaves experienced after the Reconstruction. The promises they got as a reward for the contributions they made in the liberation war went unacknowledged. This obliteration of the promises is painted through the cruel

character schoolteacher who overthrows the utopian haven that Mr. Garner and his wife had instituted to make their slaves happier and the farm successful.

Linking *Beloved* and the Reconstruction, DeKoven (1995) qualifies the novel an “American utopian fiction or rather a dystopian fiction” (p.77). DeKoven argues that

[...] the period in the 1870s and 1880s following the dissolution of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and the ultimate defeat of Reconstruction, was a post-utopian historical moment. It witnessed the break-up and disappearance of most of the antebellum utopian communities (p.77).

It is within this context that *Beloved*, in its section about Sweet Home’s rise and fall, can be interpreted as a historicisation of the evils that characterised the abortive Reconstruction. In the narrative, the character of schoolteacher personifies the demise of Sweet Home. Once he is appointed manager of the plantations, he initiates harsh policies that remove all the privileges of the slaves.

In the narrative, Mr. Garner’s Sweet Home is described as an enclosed space existing outside the reality of the South where the threatening racism is at its climax. The reader learns that outside Sweet Home, his slaves are no longer ‘men’. Their manhood is only acknowledged within the insular boundaries of the estate. Once outside, they are vulnerable and subject to the horrors that other slaves of the region are facing. The narrator reveals the hidden secret, “They were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off the ground, they were trespassers among the human race” (*Beloved*, p. 131). Sweet Home’s lack of communication with the outside impacts on the existence of the slaves who cannot know the reality beyond the estate. This closeness imprisons the slaves who will have to struggle when the unknown reality crosses borders and irrupts into Sweet Home to unsettle their lives.

Basically, the cruel arrival of schoolteacher at Sweet Home institutes a new realm where cultural erasure, individual shame and social isolation gain place. These ignominious policies were the crucial basics of the racial discourse and practice of slavery. Whites used many ways to subdue the black body and mind; but the most important technique they used was to instill in the deprived slaves a feeling of inferiority and frivolity. The comparison of slaves with animals that schoolteacher undertakes by collecting the measures of Sethe's body parts is a fact that shows the instilment of black inferiority into the conscience of blacks. In the beginning, slaves cannot understand the aims of schoolteacher's pseudo-experimentation with their bodies. It is when they experience the unspeakable tragedy that they understand they have been equated with animals. Sethe reminisces her experience with schoolteacher, "I didn't care nothing about the measuring string. We all laughed about that schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth. I thought he was a fool" (p. 201). By convincing slaves that they were inherently inferior and consequently frivolous, white masters succeeded to establish a hegemonic white dominion that was reflecting an absolute supremacy in the mind of the subjugated black body. West (1993) explains

One of the best ways to instill fear in people is to terrorize them. Yet this fear is best sustained by convincing them that their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized, and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples (pp. 122-123).

Schoolteacher transforms Sweet Home into a school of terror where slaves have to learn and obey by fear. Prior to his arrival, Sethe was confident that the place could become a home. Although she cannot be culturally detached from the South, she is now sure that the long stay they spent in Sweet Home was a life of false impressions that epitomised the failure of black existence and the hidden face of the Garners.

Kristeva describes the nature of abjection and its effect on an individual's self as "the me that is not me" (bid. p.5). Schoolteacher's mocking experimentations tip off Sethe that she is no longer the Sethe of the Garners' times. Her self, understood as "the me" in Kristevan terms, splits apart. This disturbance of "the me"—of her *rasa*—alienates her. She therefore decides to flee the place; she heads North in Cincinnati, Ohio where she hopes to secure some ataraxia. To reach this state, she succeeds to cross difficultly the Ohio River (p.117). This crossing symbolises the breakage of bondage to freedom. It is crowned by Sethe's delivery of Denver—a childbirth that metaphorically suggests victory over the enemy, that is, slavery. Earlier, we saw how the oppressed slaves perceived the North as the Promised Land (Cromwell, 2007, p.13). Sethe's flight takes therefore her to the Promised Land where she hopes she is going to start a new life devoid of racial prejudice and stigmatisation. But this transition from Sweet Home to Ohio—from bondage to freedom—lasts awhile as her former master tracks her to get the woman back only after twenty-eight days of flight. This hunt breaks Sethe's illusion of a 'Promised Home' that she was seeking to escape the Southern hostility.

5.2.1.3 Discovering the hidden humanity: Paul D's journey North and stay

The North for Paul D is very significant in his struggle against the black man's depersonalisation in the South. After he is callously sold by schoolteacher to Brandywine as a retribution to his flight, Paul D does not spend many days with his new master. Unable to passively accept the cruelty of Brandywine, Paul D attempts to kill him (*Beloved*, p. 102). Discussing Kristeva's posits on abjection, Creed (ibid.) states that the abject "threatens life and it must be excluded from the place of the living subject" (p.111). Paul D engages a battle against the new master in a way to defend and consolidate the integrity of his self which is under threat of the abject. He

seeks to liberate himself from this abject that has become part and parcel of his self and which disrupts his existence. He struggles to 'exclude' the "me that is not me" which hardens his living conditions in order to regain humanity. Unfortunately, unable to defeat his oppressor, he is taken to Alfred Prison, Georgia where he has to endure an abusively ominous tragedy of oral sex by the white guards (p. 148). Frustrated by the unspeakable dehumanisation that he experiences in prison, Paul D succeeds to escape from prison. To feel secure, he remarks that remaining in the South would put him at risk. He undertakes a long and hard journey toward Ohio (North) and ends up in Sethe's home after a long period of separation. Paul D's embarking point to the North is the prison camp of Alfred that the narrator describes with awe and pity: the place resembles a grave

Looking incuriously...the ditches; the one thousand feet of earth—five feet deep, five feet wide, into which wooden boxes had been fitted. A door of bars that you could lift on hinges like a cage opened into three walls and a roof of scrap lumber and red dirt. Two feet of it over his head; three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters (p.112).

The room where the prisoners are caged does not give the victims possibilities to live as humans. They are heaped like trash that awaits evacuation. Like Sweet Home, this place that mainly receives the innocent victims of racism is represented as a veritable underworld. While prisons are designed to detain criminals or wrongdoers, many cases that Alfred Prison receives are innocent black slaves who actually have not transgressed any law; yet they are violently arrested, put into cells and arbitrarily tried. Some are even sentenced to death penalty when they are actually innocent although Paul D is jailed for a crime he really intended to commit. Paul D's cage and his inmates' cells are exposed to any sort of peril that may cost their lives at any moment: insects and snakes of various kinds can easily access the place through the

prison's unkempt walls built of inadequate materials; and when it rains, the space menaces to collapse thereby burying the prisoners alive. They are living an inexpressible fear of death which hovers over the whole prison space including its surroundings

It rained. In the boxes the men heard the water rise in the trench and looked out for cottonmouths. They squatted in muddy water, slept above it, peed in it...Above him rivulets of mud slid through the boards of the roof. When it come down, he thought, gonna crush me like a thick bug. The ditch was caving in and mud oozed under and through the bars (sic, p. 116).

Morrison deploys terrifying metaphors of prison life to depict the horrors of slavery that featured the past of the African American community. Paradoxically, the writer turns the same oppressing space into a footbridge that facilitates the prisoners including Paul D to run away and thereby escape the hecatomb of Alfred Prison

Some lost direction and their neighbors, feeling the confused pull of the chain, snatched them around. For if one lost, all lost. The chain that held them would save all or none, and Hi Man was the delivery. They talked through that chain like Sam Morse and, Great God, they all came up. Like the unshriven dead, zombies on the loose, holding the chains in their hands, they trusted the rain and the dark, yes, but mostly Hi Man and each other (pp. 116-117).

Under the successful escape of the chain gang from the hellish conditions in the prison, Morrison fictionalises the historical Underground Railroad that saved numerous lives of fugitive slaves from the South. Similar to the fugitive chain gang from Alfred Prison, the Underground Railroad was a network of abolitionists who sacrificed their lives in providing assistance to the slaves to leave the South and join the American North or Canada, in some cases. This network was working as a secret organisation of goodhearted benevolent whites and franchised blacks; it contributed significantly to the liberation of many blacks who were confined in the South. Stamp Paid, who, Morrison portrays assisting Sethe from Ohio River to Baby Suggs's home, embodies the fictionalised Underground Railroad organisation. He is a black character

who struggles much to assist freed slaves and fugitives to leave the South and have a peaceful stay in the North. In his generous task of Underground Railroad agent, Stamp Paid is aided by Mr. Edward and Miss Bodwin who are two white abolitionist siblings. It is the same Edward Bodwin and his sister who received Baby Suggs and accommodated her in their own house—a sign of compassion that is atypical of the white community. Edward saves also Denver from the rage of her mother; against his own risk, he struggles again to save Sethe who is under the weight of an abject mind from hanging, shortly before she is arrested and brought to prison after the infanticide.

Working collectively as a body, Paul D and his inmates break the chains of bondage: they escape the prison and journey North where they hope to start a new life. Having longed much to leave Kentucky (the South), Paul D also craves to leave back the traumatic memories he experienced there. Relating the workings of abjection to Freud's instances of personality, Kristeva argues that the abject is part and constituent of an individual's archaeology or buried consciousness (p.63). The hunger for individual, social and psychological freedom burns Paul D who wishes to leave behind the tragic past. But the shock has been too deep to forget. Profoundly nostalgic for a place that he rather admired for its natural and physical beauty, Paul D, like Sethe, is torn by an ambivalent feeling. His 'buried consciousness' which unearths the painful permanent connection to the South foregrounds the pain of loss of the place that he and other slaves truly loved. This physical and psychological loss plagues the lives of the franchised blacks; and Paul D is among the victims

After some days out Alfred, he [Paul D] could not help being astonished by the beauty of this land that was not his. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and tried not to love it. On nights when the sky was personal, weak with the weight of its own stars, he made himself not to love it. Its graveyards and low-lying rivers or just a house—solitary under a

chinaberry tree; maybe a mule tethered and the light hitting its hide just so. Anything could stir him and he tried hard not to love it (p. 283).

This passage traces the pain that existed between the intimate connection of blacks to their roots and the disenfranchisement that cut off these roots to leave them culturally barren and socially unaccompanied. Slaves were producers of crops they could not profit from. They tilled land, planted and looked over regularly the plantations. Beyond this unacknowledged state of overworking, they lived permanently on those plantations. Despite the many years they lived in the South, they had never been socially accepted. The space rejected them and they restrained the love of the place into the unconscious. Between an individual and the space, there existed a widening gap that was left unfilled causing the oppressed slaves to feel orphaned; they had to organise secret escapes to save their lives. The alienation from the land which troubles Paul D brings him to doubt the place he once loved. But the anger he develops transforms into a love-and-hate distress. The splendid “beauty of the land that was not his” yet which might have been his property is at the center of this dilemma. The abject and the reemergence of the repressed disappointments intermingle to worsen Paul D’s grieving heart. He struggles to forget Sweet Home by trying “hard not to love it;” but the task seems hard to achieve. He still faces recurring memories and hallucinations that hurt him severely any time he is driven back to contemplate the lost treasure that he does not have hope to recover. He has repressed the horrors he endured in the region and has now become psychologically restless. To try “not to love” something that you really love is painful and sometimes can affect an individual’s psyche: this is what happens to Paul D. He experiences an uncanny affliction that shocks and atomises his humanity. He has become paranoid and developed a severe case of schizophrenia that makes him feel secure when he retreats to a solitary place. Paul D knew Sethe long ago in Sweet Home. Now that he joins her

in 124, he is skeptical about the woman's present even though he proposes her to start a new life together, "what you did was wrong, Sethe...you got two feet, Sethe, not four" (pp. 164-165), insinuating that her cruel reaction to exterminate her own progeny was beyond human morality. Paul D equates Sethe's violent character to wild animals' instincts through a synecdochic construction of "four" legs.

In Morrison's fiction, landscape plays a significant function in the representation of issues of selfhood. Carolyn Jones (1998) notes that "with the act of writing, of reclaiming the landscape through memory and imagination, Morrison suggests partially and almost inclusively how the South functions both as a site for disjunction and for reunion with the self" (p. 39). Paul D undertakes a geographical journey that takes him through a land he believes he does not belong to; yet the conscience that invites him to call the land 'home' disturbs his ego and his humanity disintegrates. Although Sweet Home denies him belongingness to the land, it is "the only land he knows to be called home" (Lonien, *ibid.* p.52). The journey he starts by the time he escapes Alfred Prison empowers him; he develops an exceptional strength that backs him in the struggle to recover his fragmented self. It is a symbolic journey that takes Paul D from the negated home to a place where he is sure he will get a home away from his denied "loved" home. By crossing Ohio River as Sethe did some years earlier, he feels relieved. Like the woman, Paul D's crossing of the River makes him feel human after many years of suppressed identity. The crossing of the River takes his ego to the stage of sublimation: it transforms the painful experiences of the victim into a state of emotional bliss that reestablishes his shattered self into a peaceful life despite the irrecoverable losses. His past wounds get an efficient healing to start afresh a veritable existence. The horrible emasculation that he endured first with schoolteacher in Sweet Home and later with the prison guards at the Alfred Prison is

cleansed. The “Promised” Ohio heals the wounds he was inflicted in the South and makes him a complete man. The years he spent in the South questioning the value of his manhood (pp.144-147) are now turned into a lively existence that grants him self-confidence and total independence with a notable social status that he merits as a man not as a slave. This resurrection that gives him social ascension and recognition as a complete human being empowers him with the capacity to think and act plainly and wholly liberated.

Morrison weaves an intricate design of locales in which she tries to match characters with space in order to show the relationship between an individual and their environment and the subsequent influence that each has on the other. Before he crosses River Ohio, Paul D struggles with his friends-inmates Cherokee in prison. The Cherokee have a deep rooted knowledge than blacks about America in general and more particularly about the geographical terrain they have been exploring for many years before blacks. In fact, blacks reached America when the Cherokee were already there long ago. This implies that Paul D has to rely on their knowledge and assistance before he starts his journey to the North, “He heard his co-convicts talk knowledgeably about rivers and states, towns and territories. Heard Cherokee men describe the beginning of the world and its end” (p. 118). Paul D has no clear orientations either cultural or geographical about his destination that he idealises as the “Free North. Magical North. Welcoming, benevolent North” (p. 118). He only relies on these Cherokee to spare him from a possible loss of the way. From his escape of Alfred Prison to Sethe’s home located in Cincinnati, Ohio (North), Paul D is also guided by tree flowers as he has little knowledge of the place. The route is very long as it will take him five months; and to succeed in his journey, he is guided by the information he obtains from a former inmate Cherokee man, “Follow the tree flowers,

always point the front...As they go, you go” (p.119). With this information, Paul D commences the journey; he is guided by a careful reading of the flowers that become important signposts provided by nature, “From February to July he was on the lookout for blossoms. The trees and flowers made his way nicely. He did not touch them or stop to smell. He merely followed in their wake, a dark ragged figure guided by the blossoming plums” (p. 119). Paul D’s ambivalent feeling shows up again. This ambivalence targets the relation between the fugitive Paul and the land which enslaved him that he is leaving at the present. He appreciates the beauty of the flowers that are assisting him to trace the way; but he cannot approach to “touch” or “smell” the best odour offered by those flowers.

While recognising the importance that nature gives him in tracking correctly the way to the North, he conversely keeps away the earthly pleasures—the smell—that the same nature provides him. Paul D does not hate nature and its offspring; but his psyche has been profoundly marred by a schizophrenic disorder that brings him to suspect everything around him. This is an effect of the traumatic experiences that still haunt his existence. He believes that if he approaches the flowers to sense some smell, he can lose time in pleasure and thereby get tracked by the prison guards whom he thinks they might be running after him to intercept his escape. Paul D is conscious that in flowers there is life but also death. He has seen flowers used to celebrate blissful events in Mr. Garner’s home; but also he has seen the same flowers used to accompany coffins at burials. Although flowers initially embody happiness, joy, success or victory, for a broken heart like Paul D, it is also possible that flowers may embody a negative sense of ruin, death or decay despite the assistance the same flowers provide him in the indication of the right way toward the ‘free’ North.

There is hope to reach his destination: Paul D starts the journey in February that he will end in July. This period is very suggestive; it coincides, in part, with spring—the time of rebirth, new growth and regeneration. From a spatial setting that dominates Paul D's struggle, Morrison veers to a temporal setting dimension here to show the importance of time in life. The springtime revitalises Paul D as he will not be exposed to many challenges brought by unfavorable weather while travelling: the threat of flooding rivers, the risk of cold and lack of accommodation at night or the danger of starvation are reduced by the opportunities offered by nature which provides him good climatic conditions. So long as it neither freezes nor rains too much in spring, Paul D has multiple facilities to sleep on the way at night and resume the trip the next morning. In addition, the trees along the way provide him fresh air and provisions to live off during the journey. This means that the trees do not only serve him as signposts but they also provide him food and shelter.

Paul D's journey now ends up in Sethe's home when he knocks at her doorsteps. He is relieved to meet a fellow with whom they grieved together in Sweet Home eighteen years ago under the cruelty of schoolteacher, "But when I got here and sat out here on the porch, waiting for you, well, I knew it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you. We can make a life, girl. A life." (p. 49). This time, Paul D has reached Ohio, the 'free land' for which he yearned for years. He ends his nomadic life in Sethe's house; but at the beginning of his arrival, he feels embarrassed in a new place that he expects to heal the hurting wounds of Sweet Home and Alfred Prison. Sethe's home has become a sinister place that shows no sign of life (p.98). Initially, Paul D is silent. He finds a house possessed and threatened by a ghost that has turned life into hell. The sinister state of the house provides an uncanny perception that weakens Paul D's hopes for a peaceful stay. He is frightened by the mysterious and odd movements

that he observes with trepidation. He has little knowledge about the presence of the ghost in the family.

In Chapter Three, we saw how Sethe's house is haunted by Beloved's ghost; it is a ghost of Sethe's dead baby-daughter murdered by Sethe herself. The return of the baby's ghost that Paul D faces now in 124 evokes the cyclic time of joy and tribulations that characterise the struggle of human existence. This uncanny encounter breaks Paul D's hopes. Morrison again emphasises the complexity of human existence. Paul D left the South with a hope that he would achieve an assuring existence in the North. He has suffered much; now that he is in a free land, he needs to relax and forget the horrors he experienced in the past.

Paradoxically, Morrison highlights the intricacy and absurdity of human existence: Paul D has successfully escaped the Southern havoc of racism. But, in the present, when he expects to start real life—to heal the past wounds—new challenges emerge. Although the new home is different from the South with regard to social acceptance, Paul D is still agitated in his advanced age. The peaceful stay he expected to achieve turns into another phase of struggle, “But Sweet Home and Alfred were harsh to me and to all my Negroes, to my fellow Cherokee. Some survived and others left us. But this place, this race-free land is unfriendly” (p. 237). Being a neophyte in the North, Paul D questions the worth and integrity of the new space.

In Kristeva's considerations on abjection, an individual under threat of the abject is much more concerned with ““Where am I?” instead of “Who am I?”. For the space engrosses the deject, the excluded is never one, nor homogenous, nor totalizable, but essentially divisible fold-able and catastrophic” (sic, p.86). The suspicion of 124 home enables him to discover Sethe's concealed realities of life after they had parted

in Sweet Home eighteen years ago. This discovery is achieved thanks to Paul D's obsession in the place—'Where am I?'—to understand first the nature and structure of the milieu before he even asks Sethe about the challenges her family is facing. Paul D spends anxiously his days with Sethe in 124. He has contributed to rid the house of the ghost and now the home is serene. His experience of various places teaches him the reality behind the vicissitudes of life and how to rely on them. He succeeds to free his mind and body thanks to a good command of the places known and unknown to him, hostile or friendly to his life. The exterior realities that the environment imparts into him turn the man into an individual whose aspirations are founded on the change for growth.

5.2.1.4 The restraining South and the lulling North: Baby Suggs's quest for a home and a reconciled self

In its profound substance, *Beloved* portrays the cruelty of slavery in its physical and emotional forms against the black race. The narrative articulates its discourse around the consequences of racism, the obliteration of the maternal bond that connects a mother to a child, and more particularly the struggle of a woman within geographical and temporal spaces that tend to reject her both from within and from without. Grewal (1998) notes that

Beloved makes brutally clear that aside from the 'equality of oppression' that black men and women suffered, black women were also oppressed as *women*. They were routinely subjected to rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children. As Morrison's novel attests, physical abuse is humiliating, but the extra-emotional pain of a mother is shocking (p.100).

The horrors of Baby Suggs in her life, first as a girl and later as a mother, provide a significant observation. Baby Suggs, who is Sethe's mother-in-law, was bought and sold repetitively at a younger age. This situation of physical instability and

psychological uprootedness impacted on the potential of the woman. In her life, she gave birth to many children but never had a right over her offspring. In the present, Baby Suggs is alone, pessimistically unaccompanied. In her secluded house in Cincinnati, she recollects the past she individually experienced, meditates on her present existence and vanishes as her ego fails to manage the horrors she repressed over years which recur in various manners. While young, Baby Suggs was a 'game fish' to her masters: the woman was subjected to numerous abusive cases of forced sex by her masters. She was impregnated at many times against her will and never saw her children reach maturity as they were ripped away at the early age. She grieves when she recollects the pain of delivery and the tragic loss of all her eight children

So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for *hearing* that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye (*Beloved*, p. 24).

Through time and space, Morrison reveals the horrors that women faced during the critical era of slavery. Psychologically traumatised, a lot of women slaves could not stand the nurture of a child born from a white father and more painfully out of rape. In many cases, the newborn was looked after by her mother with little care and affection. This lack of child care and protection victimised a lot of children: they died because of lack of basic maternal needs that mothers restrained to provide. This happened because, in the face of the children born out of rape, mothers saw the image of their white tormentor and rapist. Beside these horrible sexual assaults, masters themselves destroyed the maternal bond existing between mother and child: they considered slave women as breeders destined to produce for them potential workers. In this way, at the

early age of puberty, many children were ripped from mothers with the objective to procreate more so as to enhance the human capital.

White masters had unlimited control over those women and their children. They could auction them at any time they wished. The narrator elucidates, “What was there...in all of Baby’s life, as well as Sethe’s own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized” (p. 24). This psychological pain of maternity and loss coupled with racial threats affected more profoundly women than men. The pain of loss instilled in the deprived mothers a cold sensation where they would no longer feel affection for the children whom they thought they would lose at any time and without further claim

...her [Baby Suggs] two girls, neither of whom had her adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye...She was anxious to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. ‘God take what He would,’ she said. And He did, and He did, and He did...” (pp. 24-25).

Baby Suggs, Ella, Nan, Sethe and her mother are the five representative female characters in *Beloved* that Morrison puts into play to reveal at microcosmic level the tragedy and the psychological trauma that a woman slave went through across the entire period of slavery. Out of eight children she mothered, Baby Suggs knew six husbands or rather six ‘men’ as there was no legal contract that would unite her to any of them. This situation of maternal instability is so painful particularly for a mother who needs special care. It creates a void in her being and converts the victim into an object. The theory of abjection argues that the detachment of a mother from a child is only possible on condition that the mother be abject(ed) [sic]. The theory goes on saying that in such a situation, “the abject would thus be the object of primal

repression” (Kristeva, 1982, p.81). Baby Suggs’s sorrow caused by the repressed frustrations of denied motherhood vexes the woman in her old age. Because of intense anxiety which constantly tortures her, she has become numb due to an abject psyche; she has retreated to a secluded place and has taken a resolute decision of “no more too love” just like Paul D in a way to appease her depressed mind (p.111). Baby Suggs’s pain exemplifies the bareness of maternity. Among her eight children, she only saw Halle grow to maturity—“twenty years”. Other children were taken away at younger age before even having “adult teeth”. Baby Suggs has understood the importance of “no more too love” for children and even for her fellow blacks whom she cannot predict the future. She advocates a restrained love that would enable the victims to reconcile body with the abject self that governs it. The children are born from her womb (body), a flesh from her own flesh; but she has little authority over them. What hardens her pain and that breaks her heart is when she recollects her two little girls who were snatched away when “neither of whom had their adult teeth...sold and gone,” without “wav[ing] goodbye” to them. This blow shattered her being both as a woman and as a mother.

As Grewal (1998) mentioned earlier, a physical abuse can be easily ingested; but a psychological injury is hard to endure. Sethe’s mother before she was hanged was also subject to gang rape repetitively, right from the Middle Passage ship with Nan to the ‘new’ land where the unspeakable hell would start. For any time she bore a white baby, she “threw away and only kept Sethe as fathered by a black man whose name she inherited” (p. 117). Basically, through the tragic depiction of those characters in particular Baby Suggs, Morrison indicates the impossibility to find a home in a place that has institutionalised marginalisation against those it hates. Although she lived in the South for nearly all her lifetime until she went to retire in the North (Ohio), Baby

Suggs never called the South 'home'. She always felt aloof of the place all the time she lived there and never felt her disintegrated ego reunited. Baby Suggs's self dissolved and could not even get a place where to retreat until she relocated to Cincinnati. The subject erases frontiers of repression, crushes its walls to extend its power. Sweet Home and the other places she lived in the South never gave her the moral relief needed for an old mother. While meditating on her collapsing body and self, she recollects what the South taught her, that her "self was not self" (p. 147). All she would own by natural law became a property of the white. This alienation transforms the old mother into a homeless individual at the quest for a true home. Uprooted in all sides: having a marred past to determine her future, having known the concept of 'parents' by hearsay and, more achingly, having been disowned of all her eight children to remain childless, Baby Suggs has no reference that would foreground her life and thereby be part of the Southern community. The literal lack of home clearly justifies her psychological rejection of the place that destroyed her humanity. In her permanent musings, she questions the relevance of race and color in a cosmopolitan society where both the black and the white came to meet as outsiders. For Bashirahishize (2017a), the geographical instability reinforces her alienated self which is now in a state of decline

Baby Suggs remains psychologically homeless and continues her journey on the quest for a true home. She is embarrassed to consider whether Cincinnati is really a free home or a transitional domicile toward a true home. The South has ruined her past; and the North she was expecting to heal the wounds she carries in her heart breaks the hopes for future after schoolteacher's intrusion into her compound (p.9).

Despite that she acknowledges Cincinnati in comparison with the Southern places she lived in, it is still sensed foreign, "It's better here, but I'm not [home]" (p. 148). Though Ohio is a bit caring, it is not home: no place in the world can assign the

old mother a peacefully physical home before she secures a home within herself. The South has shattered her sense of being; and she is agitated until she achieves the real home both in its physical and psychological dimensions.

After her release, Baby Suggs leaves the South. She heads North and finally relocates in Cincinnati, Ohio where she retires. She is welcomed affectionately by the multiracial community of the village. The choice of the place is significant: having been ruined by the South up to the roots of her inner self, she cannot remain there and truly feel free even though Mr. Garner and his wife officially set her free forever. She now wants to start a true life because, in her mind, she has never existed. But her journey to freedom to achieve complete humanity is difficult. The North that welcomes her tenderly and which is technically anti-slavery reveals Baby Suggs some failings that she starts to doubt, "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (p. 100). Now in the North, she is free to live by her own. But she is economically dependent and socially kept aside for some social realities of the neighborhood. Slavery is outlawed in her new land; yet, cases of discrimination based on social class are commonplace. As Lonien (*ibid.*) observes

Morrison sets up the American North in *Beloved* as a space filled with the promise of freedom and peace for the Blacks escaping the Southern space of overt racism and slavery. Sethe and her family, as well as Paul D, travel North towards the presumed Promised Land. Indeed, Cincinnati proves to be a much more peaceful space, providing room for the oppressed to negotiate new identities for themselves on the background of their violent pasts...underneath the progressive exterior, Cincinnati is still a vastly racist and unhomely place, in reality segregated along social and racial lines (p. 56).

At first, Baby Suggs is impressed with the physical beauty of the town and the racially mixed interactions of its inhabitants. But Cincinnati is also infested with the virus of racism though it is not as acute as it is in the slave South. She is now free; but she starts to suspect the place. Morrison indicates that human beings are always liable to

weaknesses. While the South is notorious for its harsh slavery worsened by a radical racism, the North is believed to be a peaceful place—a ‘Promised Land’ for the escaped slaves who manage to leave the Southern chaos. But Morrison shows that the gentility and generosity of the North is not inclusive enough even though the region is free of slavery. It is dwarfed by other social issues that do not permit the former scarred slaves to attain a complete psychological healing. Racist mindset is also present in Ohio; and it affects bitterly the franchised slaves. As a case in point, Denver is stricken dumb to see that the famous abolitionists, the Bodwins, whom house she and her mother rent, are also infected by the same virus of racialism though shallow. She comes to discover the hidden reality while visiting the family in search for a job. To her surprise, she finds the house embellished with symbolic objects that include a figurine which recalls slavery and its related ideology against black people. From a shelf by the back door, Denver discovers a statuette that features a black boy with a

...mouth full of money. His head was thrown back farther than a head could go, his hands were shoved in his pockets. Bulging like moons, two eyes were all the face he had above the gaping red mouth. His hair was a cluster of raised, widely spaced dots made of nail heads. And he was on his knees. His mouth, wide as a cup, held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service, but could just as well have held buttons, pins or crab-apple jelly. Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words “At Yo Service” (sic, p. 268).

The figurine of the black boy which is in the Bodwins’ house is very evocative. His mouth is “full of money” with a “head...thrown back farther”. For the white man, these caricatures portray greed and abnormality to insinuate the moral and physical imperfection of the black body and thereby justify that black people resemble animals in the way schoolteacher instructs his nephews. The position of the figurine with a head oriented backwards, his “bulging... eyes” covering the whole face and a gaping “red” mouth evoke the images of lynching to which blacks were subject in the South.

This uncanny representation of the boy recalls the terror of public killings and other racial mistreatments that threatened black existence. It also heightens Denver's pain of social isolation since her mother's infanticide. Additionally, this figurine of the helpless kneeling boy with a distorted body reminds the reader of the tragic loss of Baby Suggs's children and the indescribable cruelty that the Sweet Home 'men' faced after the death of Mr. Garner.

Importantly, the description of the figurine's hair entails a sarcastic discourse intended to demean again the black body. The narrator indicates that the hair resembles "widely spaced dots made of nail heads". This imagery underlies derision and submission: the head of a nail is the part of the nail itself that is always stricken under the action of a hammer while driving a nail into wood. The only predisposition of a nail's head is thus to be hit. This metaphor suggests the agony and the submissive condition of a slave who has no right before his master. This condition is worsened by the unacknowledged duties he owes his master and the perpetual physical violence against his body. The more aching image portrays the black boy kneeling helplessly, "his mouth wide open as a cup" with the instructing words "At Yo Service". This kneeling position of the boy points at the state of inferiority and subordination; and the dictating phrase in an authoritarian mode hints at the absolute orders that masters give slaves while addressing them.

In short, the Bodwins' figurine reveals the hidden disease of racialism in Cincinnati at microcosmic scale and an existence of a racist mindset in the North at macrocosmic level. The hegemonic ideology of the white is an important aspect that still distinguishes whites from blacks even in the 'free' states. Blacks are still assigned an inferior position; but what positive this place [North] has more in comparison to the

South is that whites do not perpetrate physical violence or any other form of cruelty against the 'freed' slaves. They live peacefully in their homes with their families; but they entertain very limited interactions with the whites. The reader learns in the narrative that Baby Suggs herself does not go outside home except when she goes to preach in the Clearing. However, even though blacks are not physically assaulted as it is in the South, they are psychologically scarred.

In some ways, Kristeva equates abjection to "a hatred that smiles, a debtor who sells you, a friend who stabs you, a wife who castrates you, a husband who strangles you" (p. 79). The permanent social gap hardens the traumatic strain blacks bear for ages. Until her death, Baby Suggs kept interrogating the superiority of race and color in a cosmopolitan society like America. As incomprehensible as "a husband who strangles" his wife, she fails to understand why the white man is always interested in the debasement of the black man who is always at his service. As close as a debtor and a creditor as are a husband and a wife, the animosity that is perpetrated by the white man over his close partner-slave breaks Baby Suggs's heart: her ego disintegrates. Her interrogations are prompted by the widening gap between the two communities—a gulf that she had believed to bridge once reached the North—yet which unfortunately continues to expand out of control.

While Morrison depicts the South distinctively for its notorious cruelty against blacks, she rather portrays the North as an ambiguous space featured by a mixture of promises and disappointments. But, the writer is optimistic for the North to become a home on condition that the freed blacks acknowledge the value of their cultural roots and re-appropriate them. To become permanently connected to these roots, they need to bear in mind the painful past and commemorate the individual and collective

trauma which has become part of their legacy. The collective memory is very important to cement the fragmented selves to achieve a complete humanity.

5.2.2 The positive contrast of *Song of Solomon*'s spatial setting

The physical setting of *Song of Solomon* projects a spatial landscape which is distant from the conception of other novels' settings. It takes the reverse direction—from North to South—an uncommon route that is not familiar with Morrison's characters. Most works by Toni Morrison are set in Lorain, Ohio (North), a place where the writer was born but also a place that historically embodies freedom. This unusual change in setting suggests some change in the social order. Upon the novel's intricate setting organisation, Morrison declared in an interview with MacKay (ibid.) that it "is neither a ghetto nor a plantation," suggesting that the novel does not actually deal with issues related to slavery although some episodes of the narrative bring back the reader to the painful history of slavery experience (p.113). The geographical setting moves from an unnamed fictional town in Michigan (North) to Shalimar, a town located in Virginia (South). In a socio-cultural context, the setting shifts from the capitalistic industrialised North to the rustic agricultural poor South. In the historical context, however, the same topographical setting moves from the once free-slave state to the once holding-slave state. The protagonist's journey crosses many towns and cities among others Danville, Pennsylvania; Macon, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida and most exceptionally Shalimar (Virginia) where he unearths the hidden secret of her ancestry. This movement from North to South introduces an unexpected treatment of Morrison's setting. Initially, the South is notorious for its historical inhospitality and hostility against coloured people. Paradoxically, it is the same realm that empowers Milkman to rediscover what he and his family are in reality. It is in Shalimar, Virginia which is located in the great South where Milkman

unearths the roots of his ancestry. In this locale, Milkman discovers the true identity of the fugitive flying Solomon after whom the novel itself *Song of Solomon* is entitled. Old Solomon is acknowledged as the root of Milkman's ancestry; he is genealogically great-grandfather to the novel's protagonist. The flying journey describes old Solomon going back to Africa to regain his lost home. While Solomon left the American South to Africa, his great-grandson Milkman leaves the North going to the same South to explore the roots of his ancestry.

This reversal in the spatial setting from the North to the South is suggestive. In the previous times, a free movement of blacks from North to South was not possible. Blacks would rather strive to leave the South as it was not welcoming. Morrison is convinced that after rain, the sun shines; and that after dawn there is the day. Milkman's visit of the past hostile places to blacks implies the transience, the mutability and the impermanence of a society and its established structure. The writer shows that all social structure is always dynamic. It keeps changing as time passes: people and society cannot remain the same forever; and Morrison applies history as a tool to educate readers and the American society about the effects of social mutability. The South which used to be feared and practically impenetrable for blacks is now easily accessed by the passionate Milkman on the search of family roots. Through the physical presence of Milkman alone in Shalimar, a place that was a land of slavery and which repudiated his ancestors, Morrison shows the meaning and importance of love and the relevance of history for human beings so long as human existence is subject to change. The once hated-and-hating slave region has got a unifying and positive acceptability for both the former slave and the master.

5.2.3 The spatial proximity in setting construction

Morrison's geography in the horror novels presents a multidimensional aspect which relates to the variability in the themes that the works discuss. *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*'s spatial settings are scattered to many places located in remote areas. *Beloved*, for instance, covers several locales ranging from South to North each with a distinct aspect. Similarly, *Song of Solomon*'s incidents are disseminated in remote areas where the protagonist struggles with difficulty to join them in his objective to achieve self-discovery. However, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Love* reveal a different spatial framework. The geographical backdrops of these novels indicate a stable proximity with regard to how and where the incidents occur. In these novels, incidents take place in a relatively single environment; if there is need to move, they only shift to the neighboring places of the same area with short movements; every change in the physical occurrence is effected within the same realm.

For instance, the whole incidents of *The Bluest Eye* unfold in Lorain, Ohio. Of course, all the narrative's incidents do not open up and end up in a single place. As a case in point, the plot orchestrates Pecola's tragic journey that starts from her family house to end in the MacTeers' home. She is on the quest for a home after the family house has been set on fire by her father, Cholly Breedlove. However, next to the search for a physical home, she is also seeking for a moral comfort to appease the pain she is enduring after a double rape by her father and the subsequent pregnancy she is having. Her movements are performed within the boundaries of Lorain. The proximity of Pecola's predicament brings about an attentive and conscientious sensitivity to the neighbours who condemn Cholly's immorality and commiserate with the young victim. They feel great concern about the prospect of the little girl who has been destroyed by an individual expected to protect her.

In many ways, the spatial proximity creates intimacy and closeness between the incidents being portrayed and the characters. This is motivated by the fact that the collective knowledge of the environment and the challenges that shake the same milieu coalesce to prompt a collective sentiment about the issues of the community. The Lorain's collective knowledge about Cholly's incestuous crime ostracises him and later dies in a workhouse. His shameful death instructs the community's inhabitants about the danger of parental looseness and licentiousness.

Like *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*'s locales are compacted within two neighbouring villages that evolve through time to become a unique place as the narrative progresses. The Bottom and Medallion constitute the physical terrain of the plot's incidents. In the beginning of the narrative, these places are different though they border. Each depicts the living conditions of its inhabitants with a notable emphasis on the racial status. Initially, the Bottom which is a black village portrays the hardships that its inhabitants experience: poverty, sexual libertinism, degeneration of social values and racial abuse. However, the Medallion that Morrison presents as a white village in the beginning longs to appropriate the Bottom. To the whites' greed, the Bottom has to be converted into a golf course despite its rough relief (p.47). They find another space within Medallion to relocate the blacks. This spoliation of the black community creates a movement within the same space.

Except Eva's disappearance for eighteen months, Sula's long stay of ten years outside the Bottom and Helen's journey South in New Orleans to visit her agonised grandmother Cecile, other narrative's incidents unfold within the spatial boundaries of the Bottom and Medallion. Shadrack's celebrations of the yearly National Suicide Day take place in the Bottom. The destruction of the tunnel and the subsequent

holocaust, the immolation of Plum, the tragic burning of Hannah, the drowning of Chicken Little, the robins' calamitous attack, the devastating frost that wipes out plants and livestock...occur inside the Bottom and affect in part Medallion. The centralised locales develop a stronger common vision against the challenges that shake the community. The cry against job exclusion for black workers, for instance, and the unanimous condemnation of Sula as a threat and pariah by the Bottom community get a stronger appeal as the demands are put together to focalise on the same cause. This situation occurs also in *Love*. The visceral dispute that opposes the 'Cosey women' gains a profound attention thanks to the geographical proximity of events and environment. All the crucial instances of clash and subtlety that feature the three warring women turn around Bill Cosey's Hotel and Resort. This is a familiar place well-known in Up Beach locality. The point of contention between the women being the hotel which was a frequented and admired leisure place during Bill Cosey's time, this aspect of spatial proximity between the hotel and the neighbours develops some focalised curiosity toward the women. Their strife becomes a concern for the community although the matter is solely private to these women.

5.3 The Temporal Dimension in the Narrative Construction of Events

While *Beloved* is temporally set in the period of Reconstruction (1865-1877), *Song of Solomon* is set in the post-slavery America ranging from 1931 to 1963. Although this period literally covers three decades, the novel's plot unfolds a development of incidents and situations that extend to a period nearing a hundred years. This period documents basically the history and roots of a four-generation family—the Macon Dead family—which actually descends down from Macon Dead's father, Solomon, to the novel's protagonist, Milkman Dead. Importantly, the textual three-decade setting of the novel encompasses two notable movements in the history of black Americans:

the Harlem Renaissance (1918-1935) which started in the end of World War One and the anti-racism Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1970s). The year 1931 which is the opening date of the novel's plot was also the zenith of the Harlem Renaissance in its cultural, literary and artistic achievements ("Harlem Renaissance", *Microsoft® Student 2009*). This success invigorated the black community. After they had demonstrated the socio-cultural and scientific capabilities at equal degree with the white man, the Harlem community and the outside black isles hoped these accomplishments would grant them a significant socio-political status that would erase the stigma of inferiority they were its victims for centuries.

Although the 1931 achievements gave much credit to the Harlem scholars of the time, the social condition of the African American did not acknowledge a notable advancement. Beside the racial and class-based mindsets that were hardening black existence, the aftermaths of the 1929 financial collapse of America worsened the already bleak conditions of the deprived blacks. A painful feeling of despair and skepticism for an unseen future dominated the community. The unpromising living conditions weakened the hopes they had got from the artistic achievements of Harlem cultural ascension. Morrison dramatises this state of extreme anxiety and hopelessness right from the beginning pages of *Song of Solomon*. The novel opens with a horror scene of Robert Smith committing suicide. Initially, the narrative does not state clearly the motivations that drive Smith to undertake such a macabre act. It is silent in every detail of the venture. This implies that Smith's reasons for suicide originate from the accumulated repressed frustrations buried into his unconscious. Furthermore, Smith commits suicide before a public he has personally invited to watch and testify. This uncanny public accomplishment of a tragic event like suicide epitomises the overflow of collective frustrations of the black community. In addition, Milkman's

early deception of human incapacity to fly—to liberate from servitude—is another way Morrison deploys to paint the anxieties of the African American community caught in a mesh where they have no possibility to act.

On the other side, 1963 which is the closing year of the novel's plot is also a significant date in the history of black America. It was the crucial time in the struggle against racial segregation—a time when racial tensions attained the highest state of violence as the historian Bennett (2001) describes

It was a year of funerals and births, a year of endings and a year of beginnings, a year of hate, a year of love. It was a year of water hoses and high-powered rifles, of struggles in the streets and screams in the night, of homemade bombs and gasoline torches, of snarling dogs and widows in black. It was a year of passion, a year of despair, a year of desperate hope. It was...the 100th year of Black Emancipation and the first year of the Black Revolution (p.113).

The year 1963 was the most critical and atrocious moment of the Civil Rights Movement. It was the time when street lynching and political assassinations reached the apex. It was in this year when President J. Kennedy got slain. The Movement's primary goal was to establish black recognition and self-discovery in a community where black existence had been suppressed and ripped up over a period of three hundred years. *Song of Solomon's* temporal settings and the related historical moments in black existence have a certain connectedness in the definition and portrayal of the community's challenges and aspirations. The three decades Morrison literally devotes in the novel for Milkman's struggle and discovery of the historical family roots fictionalises the three hundred years of the black struggle that reached the pinnacle in 1963. It was in 1963 when a church was bombed in Birmingham, Alabama killing four little black girls. This tragedy heightened the existing tensions that had openly polarised America since the murder of the young boy Emmett Till in

1955 in Mississippi—a murder whose victim Morrison consecrated a play in memory of all the black victims of human folly.

Besides, the year 1963 was the time of a historical ‘commemoration’ of *one hundred years* after the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln (January 1863). But this Emancipation only abolished slavery and racism in theory but not in practice. That after one hundred years of abolition of racism blacks were still under racial subjugation, this situation fuelled them and decided to undertake a journey that would take all African Americans to the acquisition of political and civil rights to fully achieve self-affirmation and political determination. This journey undertaken by the black youth activists for self-realisation can be paralleled with the journey that Milkman undertakes—a voyage that he ends up with the discovery and affirmation of the history of his family roots.

The Bluest Eye and *Sula* provide an impressive temporal design which distinguishes itself from other novels. While *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*’s time settings are built in a jumbled up style, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* are constructed upon a chronological structure where time appears neatly organised.

Beginning by *The Bluest Eye*, the narrative evolves on a linear development traced by a chronological succession of the natural seasons. Autumn is the starting season that Morrison chooses to inaugurate the long and difficult journey of a girl—Pecola, the protagonist—who yearns for blue eyes to secure the beauty she believes would give her credit among other adolescent girls of her age especially the white girls. In the general context, autumn denotes the time of late maturity of something before its eventual decline. The novel, however, opens with scenes of ambiguity and dilemma about an uncertain development to maturity of the protagonist. Pecola lives a beggarly

life in the MacTeers' home as the family house has been burnt down by her father. The uncanny images of Pecola menstruating publicly, the rodent-infested and dirty house of the MacTeers, the unparalleled poverty of the family, Claudia's threat of cold and her immeasurable hatred of white dolls set a somber tone of the unpromising climate of the narrative's developments. These dark images are so frightening that the reader feels something fishy about the future of the young girl. The lack of autumnal hopes in the beginning stages of the narrative is a premonition of the protagonist's downfall.

Kristeva's essay on abjection points out that the abject employs disgusting materials such as dead bodies, the filth, blood in natural form of gore, excreta...to create an appalling environment that threatens the abject individual (p.46). Pecola's menstruation among her friends and the subsequent tedious questions she asks Claudia and Frieda about how to get a baby attest an abject state that is running her being. Troubled by the homelessness state and her father's treason against her body, her mental and physical existence is disrupted; and this abject existence impacts her rational capacity to meditate on vital issues of life. Morrison deploys also a terrifying description of the dilapidated state of the MacTeers' house: besides the family who lives in the house, the space is also infested by rodents and insects of many kinds. The dismal description portrays the house in a state of decay and collapse with inhabitants under the weight of an extreme poverty. This grim and abject representation of the MacTeers' home personifies the deplorable existence—the desolation and despair—of the African American community in the World War times and the following periods that were dominated by an acute paucity.

Morrison closes the novel with summer, a naturally promising season but which provides a paradox in the novel's denouement. While summer is generally acknowledged as a period of great happiness, of success and fulfillment in one's life, a time of warming for best moments of pleasure, trysts and harvest, Pecola's fate proves the opposite. Her life is doomed to total destruction of both her body and soul. Her ending tragedy begins by developing a false impression that she has already secured the blue eyes she has been longing for years. Her ego develops the *wishful thinking* defence mechanism to escape the constraining realities of her existence that unfortunately irrupt through a shocking state of madness that culminates her pain. The mental illusion, coupled with the incestuous pregnancy, destroy Pecola's potential. The pitiable voices of the neighbourhood expressed through Claudia and Frieda MacTeer mourn her downfall

Our astonishment was short-lived, for it gave way to a curious kind of defensive shame; we were embarrassed for Pecola, hurt for her, and finally we just felt sorry for her. Our sorrow drove out all thoughts of the new bicycle. And I believe our sorrow was the more intense because nobody else seemed to share it. They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would say, "Poor little girl," or, "Poor baby," but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been (p.190).

Furthermore, Pecola is unable to communicate within the real world: for everything she believes and which raises confusion, she addresses her issues to an imaginary friend who sometimes advises her about what is right to do, but who also misguides her in other cases. While Pecola is lost in a profound delirium, the imaginary friend derides her to be temporarily silly (p.127); and as a result the friend departs leaving the wandering protagonist in a senseless admiration of shadows of the acquired blue eyes. Morrison creates an imaginary character who communicates with Pecola to represent the embarrassment brought by alienation and self-denial.

Finally, there are three painful incidents that occur in summer and affect profoundly the life of the protagonist: Pecola's descent into madness, her stillborn baby and the death of her father in a workhouse obliterate the great happiness and pleasure that estival times normally incarnate. Morrison uses an overturned style to hint at the unpredictability of human nature and existence: neither Pecola herself nor the community of Lorain would have imagined Cholly Breedlove to rape her own daughter. Even Pecola's mother disbelieves her daughter when the latter reveals to her the molestation she endured at the mercy of her father. In many ways, the environment that is naturally established by Morrison's seasons breaks the logical awareness about natural seasons to portray man's naturally flawed existence. The discrepancy between time configuration and the incidents depicts the malleability and inconsistency of human nature which is subject to good as well as evil actions.

Whereas *The Bluest Eye* follows a chronological structure built upon seasons, *Sula*'s temporal construction rests on significant selected years of black history that Morrison conceives as alternatives to chapter titles in the novel. The opening chapter is set in 1919: this date marks the first year after the end of World War One. Indeed, this is a time of hopes since the afflicted victims of the horrors of the War and the atrocities of racial exclusion expect to heal the corporeal and psychological wounds they carry in/on their bodies. The narrative progresses until 1965. In this time, Blacks are no longer submissive before the white aggression. They resist violently the white man's oppression by advocating an armed struggle. This resistance of the Civil Rights Movement is depicted through the Bottom's young men who are denied jobs in the construction of the River Road. To resist the white man's racial discrimination that excludes the black young workers on the basis of colour, they organise a violent

protest in which they destroy the tunnel despite the dire consequences that follow (p. 72).

The narrative progresses chronologically until Chapter 1940. Abruptly, after this chapter, the narration process goes back. While the reader expects to proceed with Chapter 1941, Morrison shifts back to Chapter 1919 again. This recoil in narration is very suggestive. Although *Sula* cannot be credited a historical novel *par excellence*, most incidents recall historical facts that marked the American society particularly the African American struggle against racial marginalisation and poverty in the post-World Wars periods. The year 1941 was the time when America officially joined the World War Two on the side of the Allies. The entry of the country into war while many families were still facing the aftermaths of the Great Depression came to break the hopes they had to sort out the miserable financial conditions worsened by a corrupt social mindset. Morrison fictionalises this financial paucity that was undermining families through the character Eva Peace. We saw that after Eva has been abandoned by her husband BoyBoy Peace, she is profoundly bankrupt. She hardly affords food for her children and decides subtly to run away the Bottom for a period of eighteen months (p. 63). During this secret period, she deliberately decides to sacrifice her leg in a train accident in exchange of a financial insurance that would enable her and her progeny to survive the acute starvation. Rather than proceeding with the year 1941, Morrison returns the narration back to 1919 again. By breaking backwards the progression of the narrative, the writer echoes the pain of an endless regression of the human condition and the obliteration of the hopes that end of World War One period had foreshadowed.

5.4 Conclusion

An overall observation of Morrison's setting design reveals that time and space in her novels participate in the creation of horror scenery and the thematic structure that her writing discusses. Upon the nostalgic dilemma that characters experience while relocated in the free North to try a new life, Morrison suggests that outside home is always strange. The physical integration without psychosocial inclusion is not enough to accommodate a human being. The franchised slaves who had been received and established in the North could not experience complete humanity as they remained culturally cut off from their roots. It is this cultural curtailment that renders the former slaves psychologically nostalgic of the South despite the hardships they went through while enslaved there. That they were spared of the burden of the evils of slavery in the North did not fully accord them a complete socio-cultural integration. Moreover, the black integration was weakened by the hegemonic belief of the white community. It has also been discovered that the nostalgia for lost places that Morrison brings in the narratives is an important tool that helps to unearth the realities of the past with the objective to understand the problems of the present and attempt a possible healing of the society.

In this Chapter, we have also seen how the setting, in its biform structure, functions in the representation of the issues of selfhood. Basing on the geographical permanent instability of the main characters, the writer implies that it is impossible to secure a home in a space that has instituted demotion and marginalisation against its own people. Baby Suggs, like Paul D and Sethe, never feels the South as a home since her ego cannot reconcile with the place. The geographical terrain of Morrison in the horror novels indicates also that human beings are liable to weaknesses. Human existence is always at odds with failure and success. Morrison's North is appreciated

for its generous acceptance regardless of colour; yet it suffers the evil of a racist mindset and class-consciousness that make the settled slaves suspect the place. The figurine that depicts a slave boy in the house of the renowned abolitionist Edward Bodwin traces this human frailty.

Furthermore, the study found out that Morrison's conception of space generates an individual's place. Her setting design indicates that 'place' is normally sociological while 'space' has a twofold identity of both sociological and physical dimensions. In fact, the diverse experiences to which a human body is attached create a new social status. The place keeps changing for every moment an individual's body and mind experience new transformations either positive or negative.

The writer's technique of setting a novel's whole incidents in a single space or in neighbouring locales creates what this study called 'spatial proximity'. This proximity in space creates a certain intimacy and connectedness that brings the audience to appropriate the message and feel an individual concern as a collective challenge to resist jointly. The affront of incest that Cholly Breedlove casts on her daughter enrages the whole community to condemn his immorality and licentiousness unanimously. Affected in their collective conscience as one body, the entire community of Lorain feels offended: Pecola's plight becomes a social concern to decry.

With regard to the design of temporal settings, Morrison engages a broken and jumbled temporal structure in the narrative process of events. In addition, the natural expectations dictated by time are defied by Morrison in her writing. For instance, the common knowledge about natural seasons is reversed in the novels. The study found out that Morrison adopts this style to hint at the unpredictability of human nature

which keeps changing with regard to time and social circumstances. The lack of universal logicity in the natural seasons traced in *The Bluest Eye*, for instance, hints at the impossibility to predict and control Cholly's nature. Finally, it has been discovered that the narrative's temporal evolution is broken backwards in some works as it is the case in *Sula* to insinuate to the pain of a perpetual regression of human condition that obliterates the hopes for future.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This study interrogated the narrative complexities and incidents that bring about horror in Toni Morrison's five novels: *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Love*. It explored how horror is constructed through a stylisation of incidents reflected in these works in order to understand its role, use and meaning in the writer's representation of the African American dilemma. In the course of action, the research evolved on a study-base grounded in important aims among others the significance of horror in the writer's work, the use and finality of the narrative strategy of disruption in the narration process and the disconnectedness that features characters' interactions in texts. A reading of the existing critique on Morrison's oeuvre proved the need to explore the contours of horror used by the writer to discuss the issues that American society faced both in the past and in the present. In fact, an overall observation of the critique has indicated that Morrison's work had been surveyed profoundly at thematic level to understand the writer's discourse on the social concerns of the American society. Although the artistic dimension in the writer's oeuvre has not got attention in the existing criticism, the review discovered that it is important to investigate this stylistic aspect with regard to horror as it makes up the structure upon which the thematic substance of her writing reposes. It was this recapitulation that established the research problem grounded in the interrogation of the narrative complexities of disruption and disconnectedness and the terrifying incidents which institute a horror world in the writer's fiction to discuss the African American predicament.

After the identification of the problem and outlets that constituted the main articulations of the study, the analysis observed that anything that has capacity to raise horror affects an individual's psyche. This observation was prompted by the depression that characters endure upon the experience of supernatural and tragic occurrences, the indescribable brutality, the wickedness and the preying nature of some characters against their counterparts. Such a dreadful state generally results in insanity and tragic revenge by the depressed characters unable to withstand the unjust treatment. This weight of horror incidents on characters' psyche has motivated the theoretical choices of the psychoanalytic concepts of 'The Uncanny' and 'Abjection' propounded by Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva respectively to guide this study in the investigation of characters' anxieties and unstrained violence featured in the texts. As a result, the concepts have enabled the examination of the strange behaviour and the impact of supernatural phenomena on a human mind. As *Beloved*, *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* significantly illustrated, Freud's idea of 'the return of the repressed' frustrations which is the main root of characters' violent reactions demonstrated that the uncanny incidents of Morrison's horror writing depict both the past and the present human condition of the African American community. In some stages of the study, the psychoanalytic framework of *The Uncanny* and *Abjection* was supported by Propp's narratological functions from the *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) to examine the narratological processes that generate a strange world in the selected texts.

Upon the qualitative nature of the collected data and in reference with the main instigators of the horror world in the selected works, the study applied a methodology that organised data into six sections. Each section gathered data in connection with a selected research item throughout the five primary texts. The research items of these

sections basically identified the characters' violent interactions, the supernatural incidents, the artistic tools that prompt horror, the appalling iconography and the repellent temporal and spatial settings. This identification of the relevant data was made possible by the use of Kothari's method of *Motivation Research* to understand the 'motivations' and the "qualitative phenomenon i.e. phenomenon relating to...investigating the reasons for human behaviour...why people think or do certain things" (2004, p.3). Importantly, all the texts of the study centre their discourse on human behaviour and environment. The qualitative approach of Motivation Research (Method) has facilitated the analysis of characters' brutality and the eerie circumstances that pervade the novels. After analysis, it was revealed that, horror in Morrison's novels, plays numerous functions in the conception, construction and transfer of meaning as the research findings indicate.

6.2 Research Outcomes

6.2.1 Objective One: The nature and significance of horror in Toni Morrison's novels

On the basis of sociological and psychoanalytic standpoints, horror reflects what is socially hard to endure and which turns human existence difficult or basically impossible to account for. This dissertation on horror demonstrates a number of factors that drive Morrison to resort to horror in order to discuss profoundly the dilemma of African American existence in the cosmopolitan American society. With regard to the first objective of the study which analysed the significance of horror in the writer's works, the study has found out that horror is a vital tool that provides an appropriate imagination of incidents capable to portray adequately the pain and the struggle that the black community in America experiences. It fulfils underlying

functions that guide the narratives construction and meaning. Chapter Two of this dissertation elucidated its utility.

Most importantly, the study identified that Morrison's fiction rests on a two-type horror to capture the adversity of black experience: the *Universal horror* and the *Unconventional horror*. Initially, the study has identified a type of horror that dominates Morrison's appalling fiction and which is based primarily on what is common to human beings and their environment. For this reason, the study labelled it as 'universal horror'. In this horror, suggested events and incidents have natural identification in the rationally real world. Incidents used in this fiction are borrowed from the everyday occurrences. In this category of universal horror, there is no fantasy: Morrison deploys incidents that originate from human social interactions, cultural traditions and social norms. While using universal horror, the writer succeeds in creating abject incidents and uncanny stages that mirror the bleak human condition of the African American in general and the African American woman in particular.

From *The Bluest Eye* to *Love*, the universal horror appears as a continuous thread that defines the author's narratives as a unique literary tradition. Themes and motifs reflected in these texts are built and shaped almost in a similar style. Significantly, from the central social concerns of racism and the defilement of womanhood, the writer applies this tool to achieve some important goals such as: the education of her readers about the cultural values of the African American society; the mutual respect between people; equality of individuals regardless of colour, gender or class; self-recognition and the revalorisation of human dignity; and most importantly the value of the past in the redefinition of human existence. In using universal horror, Morrison succeeds in addressing issues that affect a community at a particular time; it also

enables the writer to approach issues that impact an individual in his private existence. By means of universal horror, the writer opens windows for her readers to discover the hidden facets of the African American predicament.

Beside universal horror, the study has found out that there is another type of horror Morrison applies in her fiction that this study coined as *Unconventional horror*. While the universal horror draws on what exists in the real world and which is common to human beings and their environment, the *unconventional horror* proves the opposite. It is limited in its scope and has no physical or real existence in the rational world. It emanates from Morrison's free imagination of incidents, events and circumstances that have no factual existence in the natural world. It is important to note that this horror is not part of supernatural fiction though it transcends the boundaries of the rational world. Supernatural literature, in its magical aspect, presupposes an existence of its imagined incidents, characters, symbols and images in the real world. This aspect does not apply to this type of unconventional horror. The fact that it has no connection with the real world makes it different from the supernatural horror. In its workings, there is neither physical nor mental identification of an existing referent in the rational world.

The *unconventional horror* draws its name from its origin and the way it works in the narratives to portray incidents. It has been labelled 'unconventional' because it defies the rules of the natural or "conventional" world which is the warehouse of Morrison's horror in general. Its incidents, events and situations have no common trait to define their nature: each incident or event is unique in its origin and how it portrays a message in the narrative. Such incidents are independent in nature and action and follow no rule. It is only the free imagination of the writer which guides them. For

instance, in *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's leg petering out mysteriously has no natural explanation in the rational world. This goes the same with Pilate's biological conception and birth without a navel—a state that attributes the woman an extraterrestrial identity. These states have no natural identification in the real world. Unlike the universal horror which depicts the writer's thought in a twofold imagination of commonality and individuality, the study noticed that the unconventional horror portrays issues that concern an individual at personal level. It addresses circumstances that affect an individual in their private existence. It never approaches communal or societal concerns as the universal horror does.

Unlike universal horror, the scope of unconventional horror is very narrow. The study has found out that Morrison generally deploys this style to create digressive instances in the narratives. Used as digression, instances of unconventional horror rarely occur at the beginning of the narrative or at the end. They usually occur in the advanced stages of a story to revitalise the reader whose interest in the story has been depleted by the appalling atmosphere brought by the uncanny instances created by universal horror. The presence of these digressive instances in the narrative mitigates the appalling atmosphere as they create a balanced climate which shall enable the reader to enjoy the story and proceed further delightfully.

Furthermore, the analysis has revealed that, in the horror undertaking, Morrison imagines characters who are distant with regard to their socio-cultural, geographical and historical backgrounds. In this horror-character relation, the reader gets an idea of proximity and *rapprochement* that Morrison introduces to bring characters together. The case of Circe, Solomon and Ryna in *Song of Solomon* exemplifies. Through the narrative, we learn that 'flying' Solomon was not originally American: he was

African. His wife Ryna was not American either: she was Indian by ancestry. Different characters from different societies and beyond all from different generations and cultural backgrounds are put together experiencing same problems and jointly sharing the same pain. The introduction of the character Circe in the plot—alluded here to the mythological Greek enchantress Circe—who receives Milkman in Virginia and directs him significantly to the ancestry of his family gives the reader an idea of closeness and intimacy that transforms distant (hostile) individuals into a family. Even the ending of the novel is very telling with regard to *rapprochement*: Guitar, who has just shot Pilate to death, is invited by Milkman for reconciliation. The closing paragraph of the narrative highlights this settlement (p.341). Morrison advocates proximity and *rapprochement* for the black community as a weapon to resist and defeat the destruction of black existence.

Regarding characters' corporeal distortions, the study has noted that Morrison deploys the grotesque in her narratives as part of horror to portray the alienation of the African American community within a predominantly white culture. While the grotesque in literature generally departs from the familiar, she imagines situations that are far from the ordinary occurrences: human flights, children embracing the world of magic at the early age of nine, self-mutilations or bodily transmutations are facts that are not common with human tradition. To symbolise the ugly and bitter reality experienced by blacks at the hand of the white man, Morrison applies an iconographic portrayal built in a hyperbolic and symbolic language to reach an appropriate construction of a grotesque representation. The description of Milkman's petering leg is achieved through language magnification that generates empathy in the reader. The grotesque view of Eva Peace's amputated leg which depicts the degenerative and collapsing America shakes the reader's feelings as well. This magnified and symbolic language

gives recoil to the reader who shivers in response to the compassion with the victims. An overall observation has indicated that much about grotesque characters in the texts under study deals with black characters. In fact, the writer adopts a distorted and monstrous representation centred on black characters as a way to reveal the destruction of black humanity.

In using horror, Morrison opens a vista for readers to observe and ponder on the various challenges that are destroying the American society. The cruel treatment resulting from a socio-cultural denial feeds the writer's horror imagination. The disintegration of the American society provides the basic elements of the horror that she applies in her works to reflect on the loss and profanation of human values that should unite America. Morrison feels disturbed by an endless debasing human condition that hardens black existence. The rigidity observed in the use of horror where characters are portrayed deliberately cutting parts of their own bodies out of frustrations underlies the unspeakable pain faced by the black community.

6.2.2 Objective Two: The use and the purpose of the narrative strategy of disruption in Morrison's novels

This study centred its second objective on the investigation of the use and purpose of the narrative strategy of disruption in the writer's work. After analysis, it was observed that disruption enables adequately the writer to approach the past and the present in the representation of the African American dilemma. This task was the focal point of Chapter Three of this dissertation. In effect, the most influential and predominant feature of Morrison's narrative style in the horror texts is the breaking of the narrative line that affects the textual evolution and the meaning of the story. In

reference with this technique of disruption, the study discovered that this narrative tool assists the writer to achieve a number of goals.

Initially, the study found out that disruption provides important narrative flashbacks that give the reader a significant background and context to the understanding of the whole story. In fact, while some of Morrison's novels start *in medias res* as it is a case for *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*, it would be difficult for a reader to understand the story's developments so long as the novel is neither prologued nor technically introduced. These flashbacks add important information to the novel's plot and create useful awareness to situate him within the context of the story. Much about the revelations of the painful experiences in Morrison's fiction unveils from the secrecy hidden in the flashbacks. It is from these narrative analepses, for instance, that we come to know the supernatural identity of Beloved and the reason why she has returned back as a ghost in the family to torment her mother Sethe. These fragmented narrations that predominate Morrison's horror fiction are in fact an expression of the historically fragmented lives of the black community.

In addition, the study has remarked that these flashbacks disrupt the narratives on the basis of an interdependence of the past and present tenses which alternate to provide a look at the past and the present of the human condition of the African American community. This interdependence instructs the audience that human existence always straddles over the boundaries of the past and the present to have meaning. The writer suggests that it is difficult for humans to detach from the past. Shocked by the perpetual dehumanising treatments in the Twentieth Century America, the writer highlights the interdependence between the past and the present to promote social humaneness.

The analysis has also found out that the narrative strategy of disruption shuffles not only the narrative structure (form) of the text but it also affects the plot's content (meaning). In fact, Morrison disrupts the general meaning of the texts using ambiguity as a disruptive device that muddles up the main context of a story to veer into another one different from that which the reader was expecting. For instance, at the beginning of *Song of Solomon*, Morrison portrays the protagonist Milkman Dead obsessed with wealth that would grant him a socio-economic independence and get rid of his oppressive father. It is this obsession in wealth that drives him to leave home and go to rob his Aunt Pilate hoping to obtain gold. However, after his illusions of wealth are shattered by the time he finds no gold in Pilate's home, Morrison portrays Milkman now undertaking a journey that he ends in Virginia (South) where he makes important discoveries about his ancestry. There, he is no longer obsessed with gold: his frail personality has grown into solid maturity that leads him to engage in a deep search for the origins of his ancestry in order to identify his socio-cultural and historical roots. Milkman's accidental shift from gold to family roots creates an ambivalent state in his determination to attain a socioeconomic independence. Beside this ambiguity of self-recognition, Milkman Dead is the object of passionate love and cause of death of his cousin and lover Hagar that he first loved so delightedly to despise her later so bitterly without cause (p.131).

From the start to the end, it is unclear to know the prime role Morrison assigns to Milkman as a protagonist. The reader identifies him performing contrasting tasks of almost equal intensity; it is difficult to establish the central task that would be supposed to hold grand emphasis and which would qualify Milkman as a true protagonist. The mixing-up of unrelated tasks engenders an amalgamation that blurs Morrison's audience to know what she really wants them to learn about the

protagonist. In some cases, Milkman is portrayed committing robbery of his aunt Pilate—an act that discredits his position as a hero. In other scenes, he is shown grieving over the same aunt, now shot dead by Guitar Bains out of dissensions with the same Milkman over the mysterious gold. It appears challenging to establish the nature and the personality that Milkman incarnates since they keep changing from time to time and from one place to another. This ambiguous nature and the versatility in functions of the protagonist impair his capacity as a leading character; his duality also abates the powers of the reader who has to move through a disjointed world of the text.

The study has noticed that Morrison deploys ambiguity as a disruptive device in the narratives to represent generally the dilemma which haunts the main characters. Being lost in a convoluted world, characters and the actions they perform are not relatively connected. By utilising ambiguity as a mode of narration to disrupt the plot narratives, the writer wants to portray the anxieties, the fears of alienation and the disrupted and unsettled existence of the African American community in a multi-culturally exploitative society. The racialisation of the society, the gender-biased consciousness and the socio-economic inequalities undermine the destiny of the American society whose present and potential remain uncertain for Morrison.

In the analysis, it was also discovered that Morrison creates a narrative strategy of defragmentation to counterbalance the rigidity of disruption and thereby fasten the disjointed elements of the narrative that have been scattered due the weight of disruption. In fastening the disrupted elements of the narrative, defragmentation restores the lost hopes and alleviates the gravity of pain by creating a soothing mood that serves to appease the psychological tension generated by the horrifying events

that characters surmount. *Sula* enacts a significant case of defragmentation to relieve characters' broken hearts. In a train, while on a trip to the South, Nel and her mother Helen are humiliated by the white passengers on board together. When Nel wants to relieve herself, she misses where to go as all the train's washrooms hold an informative notice of use "Whites only" (p.47). Pressed by the law of nature, Nel urinates in her stockings among the passengers who look at her mockingly. Her self breaks apart. Humiliated, when the train reaches the next station, she goes down and retreats into a bush where she cleans her body with leaves of grass. Her trip has been very dreadful: the awkward faces of the white soldiers on the train focalising on her, the all-white streets she travelled through, the lack of communication with other passengers...made her frightened. At home, when the trip is over, Nel ponders on her past journey: the shocking experiences she faced, have fortified her and she has developed a new sense of self. She reflects on the last humiliations she went through with her mother and suddenly shouts, "I am me." She reiterates, "Me" (p.47).

This self-assuring declaration of her being empowers Nel and transforms the young girl into a complete settled woman different from the one she was while travelling to the South. Her disrupted individuality while travelling is now restored. This time, Nel has acquired a new strength that makes her feel proud of herself and morally comfortable. Now, she feels that she fits the place she is in. Her fears of white domination, her fragmented memories and her shattered vision of lower status have disappeared. She has destroyed the walls of seclusion as she undertakes the journey toward self-discovery.

The feeling of "Me" that Morrison introduces in the narrative reverses the disrupted identity of Nel and her mother Helen. This feeling initiates a recreation and rebirth

that fasten together the shattered pieces of their selves through the process of defragmentation. From now on, Nel knows that *she is herself*, “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me. Me” (p. 49). Whenever she utters the concept “me”, there is intensity produced that brings the reader to feel sympathetic with narrator Nel.

In line with the process of defragmentation, this study has revealed that this narrative aesthetics functions like a process of healing: it creates a metaphor that touches both the oppressor and the oppressed. In it, Morrison provides a vital encouragement to the African American people that the horrors of alienation are fleeting away and consequently subject to defeat. In the same way, the narrative mode of defragmentation gives a message to the hegemonic white community that society is always dynamic through time; as a result one should nurture the seeds of humanity that would uplift society in its holistic grandeur. This can be perceived through the workings of this technique which normally appears after characters have experienced serious damage either physically, morally or psychologically. It therefore works as a response to soothe the broken hearts and heal the wounds caused by alienation. However, on the narrative or textual ground, defragmentation functions in Morrison’s novels as an equaliser that serves to counterbalance the antagonistic events and the horrifying situations that the writer puts forth in the depiction of the hardships of black existence.

From the linguistic ground, the analysis noted that, while disrupting narratives, Morrison adopts a sarcastic language that seeks to demystify the white supremacy as a way to rehabilitate the distorted self of the black community. In *Sula* for instance, to achieve this demystification, the writer attributes deliberately the derogatory denomination “the Bottom” to the black community to denounce the biased mindset

that whites frame against the African Americans. In fact, this depreciating name was deliberately chosen by a wealthy white master who gifted the land cunningly to his poor black slave (p.18). Basically, the writer deploys a contrastive language construction to negate the erroneous supremacy that the white community believes it incarnates. She attributes the disparaging name “Medallion” to the white community as a contrast to the “Bottom”. While a medal—“medallion”—entails a sterling prize awarded to an individual in recognition of their valuable achievements, Morrison deploys a sarcastic language to deride the corrupt beliefs that feature the white hegemony. The prize winner to whom a medal is awarded is regarded as a mentor whose sense of leadership illuminates the way to advance humanity. However, Morrison deliberately ascribes the name “Medallion” to the whites not because she truly believes they merit the title but simply because she wants to ridicule the misconception of power that characterises the white aristocracy. This deployment of a depreciative language in which ironic and sarcastic concepts abound exhumes the repressed anxieties and agony that the black community carries in its interior self.

6.2.3 Objective Three: The narrative device of character disconnectedness and the alienation of black existence

Upon the social disintegration that features characters in their permanent interactions, this dissertation discussed how Morrison’s character disconnectedness used as a narrative strategy unveils the alienation of the black people. This task was the substance of the third objective of this study that was discussed in Chapter Four. An exploration of the effect of disorientation in the selected texts has discovered that Morrison introduces character disconnectedness in her narratives for particular reasons.

A general observation has shown that the discourse on horror in Toni Morrison's novels centres primarily on the problematic issues of alienation and subordination that are depicted through the atrocious experiences of characters in various circumstances. The study has come up with an important observation in that much of the disconnectedness in character design affects black characters and most significantly the female ones. Like the grotesque horror, Morrison centres the disconnected identity on black characters to mirror the destruction of the black humanity which is atomised by the intra-social dissensions on one side and the racial tensions ignited by the oppressive white hegemony on the other side. The divisions which set apart characters, some against others, to reinforce the permanent disconnection in their social rapports, personify the radical alienation generated by the socio-cultural and economic exclusion.

Upon this narrative device of disconnectedness centred on black characters, the study noticed that the writer condemns also the auto-destruction of the black community where blacks are enemies of themselves. Morrison decries this inner alienation which jeopardises the potential of the African American welfare. Through the internal divisions in which male characters prey on the female ones, Morrison stigmatises the evils of self-alienation brought by the phallogentric structure that underrates the African American woman by placing her outside the centre of the community. This inner destruction which is perceived as self-condemnation threatens the advancement of the black community. In the narratives, women like Ruth Foster, Nel, Eva Peace and Pauline Breedlove are under the oppressive hand of their husbands who treat them less than housemaids rather than equal spouses. The disconnected existence from their husbands that they endure impacts on the social living of these men who end up miserably despite the corrupt mindset of cultural superiority. Pauline's

husband, Cholly Breedlove, for instance, who despises her, goes mad first and later dies deplorably ignored in a workhouse.

Besides, the study has noticed that under disconnectedness which exposes the psychology of many characters, the writer represents the duality of human existence. For Morrison, it is irrational that individuals who endure the same pain of racial marginalisation inflict on each other an additional pain of social exclusion which comes to exacerbate the existing bleak living conditions. Ultimately, Morrison employs the narrative strategy of disconnectedness centred on black characters to depict the fragmentation of the African American community.

6.2.4 Objective Four: The role of time and space in the construction of a horror world

The study's last objective focused on the role of time and space in the conception of a horror world in Morrison's fiction. Chapter Five of this thesis discussed the substance of this point. The setting construction in the selected texts has revealed that Morrison's genius in the choice of time and space dynamics to depict the human condition in America relies on many factors that have an important meaning in the historical, geographical, and cultural realities of the past and the present of America.

The study has noted that an individual's experience of a given space keeps changing whenever body and mind experience new forms of violence, oppression or elation. Being a member of the oppressed community, Morrison's conception of space, time and place is linked to characters' physical and psychological pain. The natural and supernatural landscapes together with time distribution in her texts are not only setting elements that play the ordinary role to accommodate the occurrence of the narratives' incidents; they also indicate in many cases the characters' predicaments with a clear

emphasis on the social and political challenges that instigate the agony they face. Within this perspective, time and space become important artistic aspects in the study of human experiences.

The research has also found out that Morrison's conception of space generates an individual's place. Her setting design indicates that 'place' is normally sociological while 'space' has a twofold identity of both sociological and physical dimensions. In fact the diverse experiences that a human body undergoes create place out of space in an evolutionary process.

Upon the consideration of space in its sociological dimension, the study has noted that Morrison considers home as the centre of human existence: it is the space where life starts and grows to maturity before it declines. Once home is violated, life loses sense. In many cases, the brutality of her characters embodies their struggle to keep home inviolate. By the time Sethe's home is invaded by schoolteacher and his posse, her body and soul disintegrate. She loses her temper and commits an irreparable crime as she struggles to keep her home safe and 'protected'. She murders her baby out of 'protection' for her home, that is, protection for her children. That home be converted into a site of oppression is what Morrison ultimately contests in her fiction. Like the painful agony that a child suffers when they are parted from their mother, Morrison provides a similar metaphor which suggests that the disconnection of an individual from his motherland (home) alienates both his physical and cultural existence.

With regard to characters' spatial moves, the study has observed an unusual reversal in Morrison's imagination of setting. Characters leave the North for the South which is notoriously known for its hostility and dehumanising treatment against coloured people. The South is a historically feared space that blacks fled desperately out of the

painful threat they suffered for ages. In African American fiction and folktales, this locale embodies the pain and the destruction of black humanity. Yet, Morrison portrays some characters exploring the place. As part of the oppressed, the writer believes in the mutability of human society. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's visit in the past Southern hostile places, for instance, entails the transience, the mutability and the impermanence of society and its established structure. The writer shows that all social structure is always dynamic. It keeps changing as time passes: people and society cannot remain the same forever; and Morrison applies history as a tool to educate readers and the American society about the effects of social mutations. The South, which used to be feared and practically impenetrable for blacks, is now easily accessed by the passionate Milkman in the search of his ancestral roots. Upon this physical presence alone in Shalimar, a dominion that was a slavery land and which repudiated his ancestors, Morrison underlies the meaning and the importance of love, the relevance of history and tradition for human beings so long as human existence is subject to change. The once hated-and-hating slave land has got a unifying and positive acceptability for both the former slave and the white master.

Regarding the writer's choice and design of locales that accommodate the narratives' incidents, the technique of setting a novel's whole incidents in a single space or in neighbouring locales creates what this study termed as *spatial proximity*. In some situations, the proximity in space creates intimacy and connectedness that bring characters and environment together to consolidate themselves against the pain they face and advocate thereby a communal resistance. Proximity in spatial setting reinforces characters' attention to the main concerns of a community. The centralised locales develop a stronger collective vision against the challenges that shake a community. In *Sula*, for instance, almost all the narrative's incidents occur within the

spatial boundaries of the two neighbouring villages—the Bottom and Medallion. Shadrack's celebrations of the yearly National Suicide Day take place in the Bottom. The massive deaths of the demonstrators against job exclusion, the immolation of Plum by his mother Eva, the tragic burning to death of Hannah, the drowning of Chicken Little, the robins' calamitous attack, the devastating frost that wipes out plants and livestock...occur inside the Bottom and affect in part the neighbouring village Medallion. These incidents are 'proximate'. The cry against job denial for black workers, for instance, and the unanimous condemnation of Sula as a threat and pariah by the Bottom community get a stronger appeal as the demands are focalised together for a same cause. Morrison introduces this dimension of geographical proximity to reinforce social commitment in that it unites the black people to resist and defeat the common enemy together.

In reference with the temporal setting design, the study has realised that Morrison engages a broken and jumbled temporal structure in the narratives. The naturally basic awareness provided by time is defied in her novels. The environment that is naturally established by Morrison's seasons breaks the collective knowledge of natural seasons in order to accommodate with man's naturally flawed existence. The conflict between time design and the incidents reported in the narratives depicts the inconsistency of human nature which is subject to change with regard to time. The lack of logical universality in the natural seasons traced in *The Bluest Eye*, for instance, hints at the impossibility to predict and control Cholly's nature. As a case in point, the death of Pecola's father—Cholly Breedlove—the premature death of her stillborn baby and Pecola's own descent into madness occur in summer. Yet, summer is believed to be the most wonderful time for people to celebrate the joyful estival time of a year. These painful events obliterate, however, the great happiness and self-assurance that

summer normally incarnates. Morrison uses an overturned style to suggest to the unpredictability of human nature and existence: neither Pecola herself nor the community of Lorain would have imagined Cholly to rape his own daughter.

In the end, the study demonstrates that Morrison's settings function globally in the representation of issues of selfhood. On the basis of the permanent socio-cultural and geographical instability of the main characters, the writer shows that it is hard to secure a home in a space that has instituted demotion and marginalisation against its own people. Baby Suggs like Paul D or Sethe never feel the South as a home since their egos cannot be reconciled with the place. The geographical terrain of Morrison in the horror novels indicates also that human beings are liable to weaknesses. Human existence is always tied in with failure. Morrison's North is appreciated for its generous acceptance of black people; yet it also suffers the evils of racialism and class-consciousness that make the settled freed slaves suspect the place.

Ultimately, an overall observation of Morrison's setting design reveals that time and space in her novels reinforce the action of horror and the themes that her writing discusses.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

An exploration of Morrison's horror in her writings is too vast to be comprehensively covered within a single work of research. This study acknowledges that it did not examine all the aspects of horror developed in the writer's oeuvre. It has only limited its scope to the nature, meaning and function of horror represented only in her novels. Yet, the writer has produced scholarly plays as well as short stories which extend her discourse on the African American dilemma. An investigation of horror instances about how these works capture black existence and the struggle for liberation would

be useful to bring further the achievements of this study. In addition, a study on the relation between horror and magical realism in Morrison's fiction would be important to establish similarities as well as differences that exist between the two genres in her works.

Ramzi and Jamal (2012) and Martins (2009) credit Morrison's fiction as a Gothic literature while Henry (2000) and Hans (2011) consider her writings a Southern Gothic fiction. There is a controversial literary debate over her work to assign it an appropriate literary classification. The core of Gothic literature centres on an amalgamation of supernaturalism and romance (Suber, 1991). Elements of haunting, mysterious deaths, sinister spaces, insanity, incest or nightmarish dreams and visions are guiding instances of Gothic literature. These elements pervade Morrison's fiction. On the other side, the Southern Gothic is an American fiction that is generally set in the South due to its historical past in connection with slavery and racism. The Southern Gothic does not emphasise much on the supernatural and suspense; Suber ascertains that it rests on "a dark humor to attenuate the implied pain" (p.112). In the Southern Gothic, writers explore generally the behaviour of people and how this affects the social order. They expose the realities of the Southern culture and its flawed structures featured by racism, poverty and a gender biased mindset. Suber maintains that characters in the Southern Gothic "are usually complex, and many of them are mentally unstable" (p.134). These vital elements that define the Southern Gothic fiction are also present in Morrison's works. This presence of horror features in both genres creates confusion in the categorisation of her work. A contrastive analysis of Morrison's works based on Gothic fiction and Southern Gothic would be useful to explore the category of the horror applied in her fiction in order to establish an appropriate classification of her writing.

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