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TRANSGRESSION AND REPRISAL IN TONI MORRISON'S FICTION:
BREAKING THE CODES OF RACE AND GENDER AS A WAY TO AUTONOMY

by

VERONICA C. HENDRICK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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by

Veronica C. Hendrick

Adviser: Professor Neal Tolchin

In my reading of Toni Morrison's novels I focus upon instances of transgression and the ensuing reprisal suffered by characters searching for autonomy. In creating a frame with which to analyze characters who rupture cultural codes, I have divided my investigation into two areas of thematic significance: images of race and gender. Utilizing feminist criticism, theories of psychoanalytical development, research in social and cultural thought, as well as historical evidence, I provide a close reading of Morrison's first five novels to explore the definitions of race, femininity, and masculinity. It is my belief that Morrison's characters strive to break from the restrictive nature of such labels in order to attain a more developed, autonomous self.

Since Morrison's novels represent America in its many imperfect states, her characters are also imperfect, and their offenses are sometimes evilly motivated or, worse, performed unconsciously. These characters elicit severe, often deadly, retribution for rupturing cultural codes of

behavior and sometimes gain none of the benefits of self-development. I, however, concentrate upon the acts that are not mindless moments of rage or selfishness, but are instead moves toward greater self-awareness and control. Characters who fight known expectations obtain a degree of personal self-sufficiency. Significantly, the most serious moments of transgression yield equally profound reprisals in the forms of isolation, madness, conscription into a mystical/magical world, or death.

Ultimately, what I hope to prove is that for Morrison's characters, despite genuine torment and sometimes continual suffering, their acts of transgression are necessary paths to self-development and self-knowledge, and the risk of isolation, madness, and death is worth the possibility of living autonomously. Autonomy, control of oneself and one's future, is an impossibility in Morrison's fiction because of the oppressive structures I discuss, which dictate codes of behavior according to images of race and gender; however, I am utilizing the term autonomy to investigate the agency that the characters develop within and against these structures. The successful characters in Morrison's fiction are those individuals who distance themselves from the control of external definitions and attempt to break from limitations.

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Introduction

In my reading of Toni Morrison's novels I focus upon instances of transgression and the ensuing reprisal suffered by characters searching for autonomy. In creating a frame with which to analyze characters who rupture cultural codes, I have divided my investigation into two areas of thematic significance: images of race and gender. Utilizing feminist criticism, theories of psychoanalytical development, research in social and cultural thought, as well as historical evidence, I provide a close reading of Morrison's first five novels to explore the definitions of race, femininity, and masculinity. It is my belief that Morrison's characters strive to break from the restrictive nature of such labels in order to attain a more developed, autonomous self.

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In order to add to and develop themes presented in existing cultural criticism devoted to Morrison's fiction, I have utilized applications and discussions of racism, feminism, and masculinism found in the growing body of literature devoted to Morrison's writing. To distinguish my work, I have focused upon peripheral character who are often left out of analysis. I have devoted sections to the analysis of white characters in Morrison's fiction who are

oppressed by American cultural definitions which they embody and support. In my research I have found only scanty allusions to this portion of Morrison's character development and believe that its significance warrants careful study and close reading.

I have structured my writing according to thematic interests, rather than dealing with each novel in isolation, in order to emphasize the continuity in Morrison's fiction. This structure allows the possibility of discussing a particular event according to three distinct angles and enables me to highlight the differences among the three aspects of cultural control I have prioritized: codes of race, femininity, and masculinity. By focusing upon these thematic points, I find that each novel presented replicates similar problematic situations for Morrison's characters despite the variety of settings and class conditions found in the separate novels.

In fact, by discussing the chronological order in which these novels are set, a format that I have not encountered in my research of the critical work on Morrison's fiction, it becomes clear that social and cultural progress in America does not alleviate the restrictive nature of the overarching codes controlling behavior. Indicative of what I believe to be Morrison's didactic agenda, family names and events that transpire in one novel are replicated in other novels which adds to the way in which Morrison's fiction

echoes and foreshadows itself. By tracing the movement from the 1860's to the late 1900's, the continuity in the plight of Morrison's characters who struggle to become self-actualized is emphasized. The only things that are modified over time are the details of culturally defined racial and gender codes and the methods of with which these codes are enforced. The existence of enforced codes dictating behavior, and the corrosive qualities of these codes, remain ever-present.

In my first chapter, I trace Morrison's use of slavery, segregation, and racism to discuss both black and white characters restricted by racist structures and their need to transgress these limitations to attain autonomy. By following the chronological order of the novels' settings, I point out movement from slavery in Beloved through various racially discriminating structures of The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, and Sula leading up to the strained relations in Tar Baby. I devote my attention to Beloved and Song of Solomon because these two novels utilize historical events to highlight and confirm the racial codes in America culture. Morrison uses the actual events of the slave Margaret Garner to weave her story of Beloved, and the events surrounding the murder of Emmitt Till are instrumental in the development of the racial identity in Song of Solomon. I have, therefore, culled out these two novels to discuss the broad ramifications of racism in America and

discuss the character development of individuals trapped by this structure.

I analyze the white characters who adhere to racist codes and thereby bypass transgression and personal growth. I then discuss the white characters who at least try to break the rules governing white and black interaction, meet with sanction, and at times attain autonomy. Then I investigate the black characters who perpetuate the boundaries of racism, dodge punishment and reprisal by avoiding infractions. And finally, I examine the black characters who choose to rupture the system dictating their behavior, suffer the consequences, yet enjoy personal gains. By creating this framework and analyzing the characters operating within it, within the institution of slavery and its legacies, acts of transgression and the ensuing reprisals become apparent. And, like many acts of transgression that I discuss, rupture of these existing systems enables personal growth.

In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Morrison calls attention to the dearth of material focusing upon the ramification of slavery and racism on the minds of the racists. This work, along with key works of African American literary criticism, enables me to discuss Morrison's writing with specific attention to the social and cultural situations presented in her novels. I also use Eugene Genovese's seminal text Roll, Jordan, Roll

to help me place Morrison's novels in their proper historical context. My discussion of Amy Denver's status as an indentured servant, of Stamp Paid and Paul D's employability after the war, and the conditions of "good" slavery is informed by Genovese's work. My work highlights the ways in which Morrison's characters, both black and white, adhere to or reject oppression and thereby attain or bypass self-knowledge.

In my second chapter, **What's a Woman to Do?: Femininity as Motherhood and Beauty**, I continue examining the system of retribution enacted against characters who break stated or implied standards. In this chapter, as well as in my third chapter, I discuss the impact of the combined codes of race and gender upon Morrison's characters. In Morrison's novels, I find complex portrayals of women searching for self-definition within or against proscribed and enforced notions of femininity. For my purpose, in this chapter I research paradigms of beauty and motherhood in both African American and dominant American culture and how these models restrict the movement of the female characters in Morrison's novels. Just as I believe Toni Morrison denounces the barriers of slavery, segregation, and discrimination, I believe she uses her novels to criticize the restrictions placed upon women. In fact, as I trace the enforced images of beauty and motherhood in her novels, I also pay particular attention to the characters who are caught in the

doubly oppressed position of being both women and black. I study the women who reject the cultural definition of femininity--the external codification of beauty and the obligations and limits of motherhood--and the prices that they pay for this liberty.

Informing this chapter is feminist scholarship highlighting the restricted position of women in American society. I cite studies discussing the restrictive impact of motherhood and domesticity on the development of women, as exemplified by Linda Kauffman's Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism. The various writings of both Barbara Smith and bell hooks help me to discuss black female characters who struggle for autonomy by rupturing restrictive models of femininity presented by a society that is both male and white. I employ these theorists to develop my theme in this chapter, and hopefully illustrate the need for Morrison's female characters to break these standards to attain autonomy.

In my final chapter, **Masculinity and Power: "Boys will be Boys,"** I investigate the male characters in Morrison's novels and how they work within or against the structures that define masculinity. Michael Kimmel asserts that "manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture. In fact, the search for a

transcendent, timeless definition of manhood is itself a sociological phenomenon" (5). Much in the way that I applied the theme of transgression and reprisal to the female characters who are restricted by definitions of femininity, I examine the struggle for autonomy that male characters undergo as they adhere to or break from the limitations of masculine ideals. As in the earlier section, I demonstrate how Morrison's novels reflect African American and the dominant cultural's paradigms of masculinity. According to these standards, the definition of masculinity necessitates the possession of power and strength, be it physical, economic, or emotional power and strength. As I move through the novels chronologically, I highlight the social/cultural restrictions governing the men and influencing the ways they exercise their sense of self.

I scrutinize the white and black male characters who are caught within codified roles of behavior. Paying special attention to the black male characters, I find that they not only face pressures to prove their masculinity but, due to their race, also face exclusion from the various apparatuses that would help them gain this status. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West, in The Future of the Race, discuss the problematic situation of masculine identity for black men in America. Similarly, editors Marcellus Blount and George Cunningham in Representing Black Men, offer articles discussing various problems encountered by black

men in America. These works shall help me contextualize Morrison's novels and aid me in developing my final section focusing upon the male characters in Morrison's fiction who transgress the external definition of manhood that necessitates power manifested through economic clout, physical/corporal strength and/or violence. Morrison's male characters need to confront the options of assimilation, erasure, and violence, or they must transgress American ideals of masculinity.

The embracing thought I highlight is that transgressing established expectations defined by cultural codes such as blackness/slave, whiteness/oppressor, female/feminine-beautiful-mother, and male/masculine-economically and physically powerful-father is essential to the development of autonomy in Morrison's characters. Breaking from the limitations of these definitions is essential to the character's claim to selfhood. No matter how painful the reprisal, the retribution, or the payment for this power over self is, it is worth it. The characters who do not transgress the limitations of their role are ultimately powerless and their compliance leads to erasure.

Chapter I: "Codes Racial of Oppression in Beloved and Song of Solomon"

Before beginning my examination of Morrison's characters who risk their lives to attain autonomy, I find it necessary to discuss the need for such scholarship. Quoting Morrison's interview in "The Black Atlantic," where she suggests that "'modern life begins with slavery,'" James Clifford goes on to suggest that "Morrison's 'modern person' is the result of struggle with a 'pathology'" (265). "'Slavery broke the world in half,' she [Morrison] goes on to say. And not only for Africans: 'It broke Europe.' It made Europeans slave masters" (265). In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Morrison calls attention to the lack of scholarship focused upon my first topic: The slave holders and racist characters in her fiction and how the form of slavery limits their personal freedom. Morrison recommends that important studies on "the origin and fabrication of racism itself . . . should be joined with another equally important one: the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it" (11). Or as bell hooks contends, in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, "racism is a white issue as much as it is a black one" (111).

I hope to add to what Morrison calls "a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the

mind, imagination, and behavior of masters" (12). Morrison suggests the need for investigation of literary whiteness and blackness. Similarly Michael Awkward submits that "rather than emphasizing the impossibilities of reading across manmade and hence, fundamentally arbitrary lines, I posit that a willingness to acknowledge that race and gender are constructed can enable rather than disable provocative honesty" (6). In order to discuss these ideas, I move slowly through the novels offering close readings of the various white characters who grapple with limitations imposed by racial codes. From this starting point, I switch to the black characters who are the predominant focus of my reading of Morrison's work.

Instrumental to discussion of these characters is my theme of transgression and reprisal. By this I mean that the characters who do violate the limits of racist codes are punished, however they attain personal growth and autonomy. The characters who do not violate these codes are also punished, but they do not reap the benefits of personal growth that the transgressive characters do. Particularly interesting are the characters who seem to rupture the racist codes--in fact flout their rebellious actions--but in reality are supporters of the overarching system of slavery and discrimination. There are several white characters in these novels fulfilling this description.

The characters of Amy Denver, the Garners, and the

Bodwins are much more fascinating than the inhuman figures of schoolteacher and his abhorrent nephews. These first characters are intriguing because of their complexity. They are not one-dimensional bad guys suffering from megalomania. Entangled within their own conflicted roles, they are limited in their ability to act out personal desires and are confused about their motivations in their dealings with the slaves, runaways, and freed slaves.

Section I: "Transgression of Race and Class Codes in
Beloved"

Hazel Carby contends that in "viewing novels as weapons for social change, literary and cultural criticism needs to consider how these novels actively structure and shape Afro-American culture and political struggles" (95). In addition to this, I believe that unearthing covert racism in the characters claiming to be liberal confirms the power of institutional discrimination and highlights the need to break these restrictions. The racist codes highlighted in Beloved expose the undercurrents of racism in the more benevolent white characters and can, thereby, become indicators for closer scrutiny of modern racial codes in the African American culture and the dominant American culture as well.

The first white character I shall discuss is Amy Denver. She disregards the social structure of slavery through her aid of Sethe; however, she escapes punishment because several personal characteristics negate her transgression. The primary reason Amy averts reprisal, and also self-development, is her social level. Because she is a recently freed indentured servant, Amy's and Sethe's status are more similar than divergent. Amy is on par with freed slaves. Eric Williams quotes C. A. Herrick's White Servitude in Pennsylvania stating "'no matter how kindly they may have been treated in particular cases, or how

voluntarily they may have entered into the relation, as a class and when once bound, indentured servants were temporarily chattels'" (16). This point is extremely important because Amy's status protects her from the reprisals meted out against the other white characters who undermine the slavery system. Because Amy is not yet fully part of the oppressive system, she can aid a slave much in the way the slaves aid each other.

If Amy were not "the raggediest-looking trash you ever saw," as Sethe describes her, she would have held a different social status dictating her actions more clearly (Beloved, 31). Perhaps, she would have turned Sethe in for reward money. Instead Amy senses her liminal position in the social hierarchy. Williams explains "white servants included a variety of types. Some were indentured servants, so called because, before departure from the homeland, they had signed a contract, indented by law, binding them to service for a stipulated time in return for their passage" (9). Amy details the scenario of her mother's arrival: "My mama worked for these here people to pay for her passage. But then she had me and since she died right after," Amy was left to work off the contract (Beloved 33). Her former master, Mr. Buddy, is described as a cruel man who is also quite possibly Amy's father. Amy questions her parentage, asking Sethe, "Joe Nathan said Mr. Buddy is my daddy but I don't believe that, you? (Beloved 81). The threat of Mr.

Buddy's sexual misconduct is clear, but Amy seems to have left the farm because of the beatings she received and her desire to go to Boston to search for velvet.

Also influential in nullifying her effrontery is Amy's attitude toward Sethe and the aid Amy offers her. Amy does not acknowledge breaking any social or institutional rules or that Sethe is even human--Amy sees tending to Sethe's beaten body on a par with the way she would comfort an injured dog. Because Amy's attitude is in keeping with the regulations of slavery, her infraction is mitigated by upholding the overriding system and she avoids retribution.

Amy is an out and out racist, who proclaims Sethe's worthlessness at the same time that she risks her own life to salvage Sethe's broken body and enables the successful birth of her namesake, Denver. Accidentally stumbling upon Sethe in the backwoods near the banks of the Mississippi River, Amy finds Sethe prostrate on the ground. Sethe is considering allowing herself to die there and then. She is brought back to life by several forces: the baby--the "antelope"--kicking in her belly and the thought of dying while the baby lived on inside her, the desire to turn into a snake and bite the ankles of the slave catcher she thinks is approaching, and the tender ministrations of Amy Denver's sweet, sweet hands. Interestingly, Amy's roughness and naivety are so well blended that her racial epithets inexplicably soothe Sethe. In Amy's presence the "antelope"

discontinues its frantic kicks and Sethe is able to rest.

The conflict making Amy so distinct and yet so emblematic of the constraints of slavery is her ability to chastise Sethe for her blackness while easing the pain Sethe's blackness incurred. Placing spiderwebs across the whip wounds, leaves and moss against the swollen and inflamed feet, and massaging some of the pain away, Amy contradicts her continual admonishments of Sethe's race and lack of humanity. Amy does not see herself as actually breaking the slavery code. Amy does help Sethe, but she compares her act to the kindness she would offer to any wild beast found injured because she is "good at sick things" (Beloved, 82).

Amy constantly refers to Sethe as either an animal or a thing, which supports the slavery definition of blacks and at the same time absolves her of any cognitive transgression. Marcellus Blount, citing Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s, Figures in Black. Signs and the "Racial" Self, states that Gates "argues that from its very inception, African American literature has contested and signified upon a modernist discourse that posits the black as cultureless and subhuman, a subhumanity that is demonstrated by the black subjects' supposed lack of a tradition of letters" (83). He argues that the "black writer has to create, then, a literature that both produces him as an insider, a rational subject, and that concurrently critiques and transcends this

same Inside/Outside binarism that is itself produced via the dehumanization of the black" (83). With this in mind, it becomes clear that Blount feels Morrison's project, as a black writer, should continue to develop her own unique writing style--transgressing novelistic limitations of form and genre--as well as developing transgressive black characters. The creation of the Amy Denver character places "Inside/Outside binarism" at the fore, and Amy's interaction with Sethe highlights her inability to break from this code. When Sethe is unable to move from the ground where she has collapsed, Amy asks her "what you gonna do, just lay there and foal?" (Beloved, 33).

Amy stays with Sethe and sees her through the night with her calming voice and tender hands. Ironically, it is Amy who insures the successful birth of Denver; ironic because she berates Sethe's wanton black nature which she believes caused Sethe's pregnancy in the first place. Amy chides Sethe, whom she calls Lu, "'Whose baby that?, . . . You don't even know. Come here, Jesus,' Amy sighed and shook her head" (Beloved, 78). Completely invested in stereotypes, Amy is unable to comprehend that Sethe is already the mother of three children born in wedlock. Her deep seated racism and genuine feelings of condescension belie her acts of kindness and prevent her from completely breaching the institutionalized codes. Because Amy does not see herself as a violator of slavery codes, because she does

not want to help Sethe as much as she must help Sethe, Amy's transgression is minimal. As Amy settles down to sleep she extols Sethe: "Don't up and die on me in the night, you hear? I don't want to see your ugly black face hankering over me. If you do die, just go on off somewhere where I can't see you, hear?" (Beloved 83). In the morning, after the birth of Denver, Amy allows Sethe a short nap before strapping the infant to Sethe and disappearing into the brush because Amy "wouldn't be caught dead in daylight on a busy river with a runaway" (Beloved 85). Amy is the only character in Beloved who defies the restrictions of slavery without incurring reprisal.

Significant also, Amy's acts are isolated and secluded. Unlike the Garners, Amy's aid is coincidental. This is in part linked to what I have suggested above. Amy had no intention of helping a runaway slave and does not see herself as a friend to slaves. Because she happened upon Sethe, she helps. No one sees her and because no one sees Amy--and Amy herself defines her activity on the level of helping, begrudgingly, an animal--it is as if she does not break any of the slavery codes. The phrasing in the novel evokes all of these conflicting aspects of Amy's predicament:

On a riverbank in the cool of a summer evening two women struggled under a shower of silvery blue. They never expected to see each other again in

this world and at the moment couldn't care less. But there on a summer night surrounded by bluefern they did something together appropriately and well. A patroller passing would have sniggered to see two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws--as slave and a barefoot whitewoman with unpinned hair--wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore. But no patroller came and no preacher. The water sucked and swallowed itself beneath them. There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well. (Beloved 85)

This beautiful section highlights Amy's status--an unkept, unshod, white woman bespeaks her low social status as a "throw-away" person--which allows her to escape reprisal for her competence and kindness.

The Garners, the slave owners of the Sweet Home farm, continue the pattern of conflicted characters. Like Amy Denver, they contradict their words with their actions. However, where Amy spouts racist sentiments and performs humane acts, the Garners spew empty words of kindness and humanity while condoning and enacting cruel behavior toward their slaves. Hypocrisy is evident.

The Garners violate several laws controlling activities of the slaves. They let their slaves carry guns, have control of the livestock and farm, and hire themselves out

for pay. It is in this way that Halle is enabled to buy his mother's freedom. However, the kindness offered Halle is suspect. Suggs only allows Halle to buy her freedom because it pleases him. She knows her monetary value is low, thinking "What for? What does a sixty-odd-year-old slave woman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for" (Beloved 141). Suggs knows that Halle is forever trapped because it took many years to earn enough to buy her freedom, and Sethe's price, not too mention the price of their two daughters, would far exceed the price for a woman past her prime.

When Garner asks Suggs to verify that Sweet Home was the best place she had ever lived, and that he allowed Halle to buy her, she answers, "Yes, sir, you did" and thinks, "But you got my boy and I'm all broke down. You be renting him out to pay for me way after I'm gone to Glory" (Beloved 147). Paul D studies the value of the slaves as he grapples with defining his personal worth and realizes that Sethe's price was greater than his because Sethe is "property that reproduced itself without cost" (Beloved 229). Therefore, allowing Halle to work for Suggs' price--she is surely more valuable to Halle than a slave trader--is not all that kind.

Eugene D. Genovese explains, in Roll, Jordan, Roll, that "Masters seized the opportunity to hire out their slaves and to hire those of others as a matter of good business and convenience (391). Often, slaves could "hire

their own time"--that is, choose their own masters and make their own arrangements . . . to accumulate and save money. Some bought their freedom despite antimanumission laws (Genovese 393). With these factors added to the Garners' seemingly benevolent treatment of Halle and Suggs it becomes questionable how nice the Garners truly are. Similarly, in discussing Mr. Bellmont from Harriet Wilson's Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black (1859), Hazel Carby notes that "in a close resemblance to the position of many abolitionist, Mr. Bellmont and his son offered sympathy and loud protestations but were unwilling to assert the moral superiority of their position by fighting the mistress, the South, and imposing an alternative social order" (45). Both the Garners and the Bodwins are guilty of this same lack of willingness to change the established order. Suggs had believed "the Garners . . . ran a special kind of slavery, treating them like paid labor, listening to what they said, teaching what they wanted known . . . it surprised and pleased her, but it worried her too" (Beloved 140). Suggs is aware that although the Garners' transgressions are limited, there is a balance owed. The Garners pay for these offenses because they have none of the protection Amy's status and stupidity allow her.

The key to the Garners is their hypocrisy. Although they claim to be liberal in their handling of the slaves, they are inauthentic in their attack on slavery codes.

Therefore they gain none of the personal benefits for their transgressive behavior. Because of this lack, they do not attain "the highest stages of development" which Carol Gilligan explains to be when "morality is freed from both psychological and historical constraints, and the individual can judge independently of his own particular needs and of the values of those around him" (550). As an example, Mr. Garner takes great pride in the fact that all of the male slaves on his farm are "men," and that they are treated with dignity and allowed to possess guns and give comments on the management of the farm. However he is a braggadocio about his seemingly humane dealing with the slaves, and his seemingly fair attitude is governed by eternal codes.

Mr. Garner's ideology presents a two-fold problem. The first most clearly limits his personal freedom. He is murdered. There is an indication that a neighbor kills Mr. Garner because of his radical ideas and his haughty manner. Mr. Garner's lenient treatment of the slaves outrages his neighbors. One man complains that "there's laws against what he had done: Letting niggers hire out their own time to buy themselves. He even let em have guns! And you think he mated them niggers to get him some more? Hell no! He planned for them to marry!" (Beloved 226). Garner's motivation is not charitableness, but instead self-centeredness. Mr Garner's ability to flout the fact that his slaves are "men" inevitably caused commotion in town.

And in the presence of a new-comer, Mr. Garner's statements would usually cause an argument. This pleased Mr. Garner immensely, not only could he insult the other men but he could also feel justified in beating another man when his words caused physical confrontation:

"Y'all got boys," he told them. "Young boys, old boys, picky boys, stroppin boys. Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of em. Bought em thataway, raised em thataway. Men every one."

"Beg to differ, Garner. Ain't no nigger men."

"Not if you scared, they ain't." Garner's smile was wide. "But if you a man yourself, you'll want your niggers to be men too."

"I wouldn't have no niggermen round my wife."

It was the reaction Garner loved and waited for. "Neither would I," he said. "Neither would I," and there was always a pause before the neighbor, or stranger, or peddler, or brother-in-law or whoever it was got the meaning. Then a fierce argument, sometimes a fight, and Garner came home bruised and pleased, having demonstrated one more time what a real Kentuckian was: one tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men. (Beloved 11)

The realization that Mr. Garner is self-serving is

disconcerting. However, Genovese suggests this scenario was not uncommon and that "during the nineteenth century the slave holders boasted that they had civilized the savage Africans and taught them skills and even how to do any work at all" (389). Reading Mr. Garner this way slowly unfolds his egocentric agenda. Under close scrutiny the thin veneer of a symbiotic relationship between master and slaves is dissolved. The Sweet Home men's claim to manhood is by Garner's definition: "They were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watch dogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible human spoke" (Beloved 125). The Garner's brand of slavery is selfishness--not kindness--because "Mr. Garner acted like the world was a toy he was supposed to have fun with" (Beloved 139). The slaves on Sweet Home could not fathom the extent to which Garner's actions were oppressive.

Blount, in considering Delany's The Condition, Elevation, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States explains that Delany "is concerned primarily with both demonstrating and breaking the symbiotic dependence that exists between the (black) slave and the (white) master . . . [arguing] that the blacks will never be fully free, fully human, until they escape from white households and learn to fend for themselves" (75). This reality is clearly

felt by the slaves of Sweet Home, and especially vocalized by Baby Suggs as she discovers the beating of her heart. Suggs, for the first time, claims ownership of her body and recognizes aspects of it, such as her beating heart, that she had not noticed while a slave.

What is also significant is Blount's attention to the slaveholding whites who he suggests could "not function in the absence of slaves . . . This symbiosis, this never-ending cycle of interdependency, of ritualistic acts of dominance and submission, is best described, I believe, as sadomasochistic. The violence inside the master/slave dyad is never completely functional" (75). By this, Blount means that the pleasure of the schema is the interdependence itself rather than the obedience of a slave or the slave's productivity. This can be seen in connection with the male workers on Sweet Home, with whom first Garner then schoolteacher develop interdependent relationships. I assert that the situation for Sydney and Ondine Childs in Tar Baby, and Pauline Breedlove in The Bluest Eye, reflects this dynamic, although in a context mitigated by volition. Yet, in both scenarios, only by breaking these codified systems--getting out of white households--can these characters develop an autonomous self.

Returning to the white household of Sweet Home, I find the Garners' second ideological problem is equally subtle. The trouble lies in the incongruity between what they

believe to be equitable treatment for "men" and the actual shabby way they treat the slaves. Genovese defines the type of *good master* the Garners embody. They simply "fed, housed, and clothed them [the slaves] at the prevailing standard of decency" (125) which made them outstanding. They were considered good masters because of their comparative lack of cruelty. Similarly, this definition of a *good master* is fulfilled by Mrs. Garner and her interaction with the house slaves. Mrs. Garner is compassionate, except this definition is created by the Garners, not the slaves. All Baby Suggs, the Garners house slave (mother of Halle and mother-in-law of Sethe) had to do "was stand beside the humming Lillian Garner while the two of them cooked, preserved, washed, ironed, made candles, clothes, soap and cider; fed chickens, pigs, dogs and geese; milked cows, churned butter, rendered fat laid fires . . . Nothing to it. *And nobody knocked her down*" (140) [italics mine]. This list of tasks is daunting in and of itself, but add the reminder that Suggs is an older woman with a hobbled gait--her hip injured by her last owner. In this context niceness is defined by the fact that Mrs. Garner *did not knock Suggs down*.

Mrs. Garner seems to treat Sethe adequately, even gave her earrings for her wedding. Again Genovese's statement modifies the perception of Mrs. Garner's actions: "As masters became convinced of the social and economic utility

of stable unions among their slaves, they reflected on the importance of ceremonies to celebrate the seriousness of the marital tie" (475). Her true attitude toward the slaves comes through when she brings schoolteacher to Sweet Home. The rapid turnabout Mrs. Garner makes when her husband dies indicates the tenuousness of her prior liberalism. Lori Askeland states that "the limits of True Woman's domain, however, become clear upon Mr. Garner's death: a 'decent' white woman cannot live alone on a farm with no one but slaves" (792). Mrs. Garner is not comfortable on her farm without the protection of a white man--in this way her adherence to the external codes of slavery limit her personal freedom and reveals her hypocrisy.

The contrast between Sweet Home before and after the death of Mr. Garner is dramatic. Mr. Garner is seen as a *good master*, and when he dies Schoolteacher "corrects" the transgressive situation. Genovese explains that this scenario was not uncommon in slavery. When the good master, i.e. Mr. Garner, dies "the slaves had reason to lament and to be frightened. The death of a master threatened a property division and sale of a plantation that, whatever else it was, was the only home they knew" (350). This reality is expressed by Paul D's reflection that "It all depended upon the life of one white man . . . and when that white man died so did almost all the black men " (Beloved 125).

Mr. Garner, the good master, violates the slavery code. He goes too far by giving his slaves guns and certain liberties and he pays for his breach with his life. Interestingly, the Sweet Home slaves fulfill Genovese's description of the emotional attachment slaves may have felt toward their master: "Ole Massa may not have been ideal, but the slaves had learned, through many painful experiments, how to handle him. Now they would have to begin all over again with a new and often unknown quantity (350). And the unknown quantity is schoolteacher. Schoolteacher is obviously a racist, and the reader is happy to classify him as such because "schoolteacher not only exploits slaves, he is fascinated by the intellectual arguments he constructs to rationalize exploitation" (Christian 338). Like Genovese's "Ole Master," Mr. Garner is missed by the slaves because he, in contrast to schoolteacher, is ostensible good. What is important here is that both Mr. and Mrs. Garner are seemingly good. In reality, they are oppressive.

With the arrival of schoolteacher the slaves learn exactly how precarious their prior situation was: "schoolteacher beat [Sixo] . . . to show him the definitions belonged to the definers -not the defined" (Beloved 190). Because Morrison presents schoolteacher as such a horrific character, Mr. and Mrs. Garner take on angelic roles by virtue of their lack of cruelty. Hazel Carby suggests that the Garner's contradictory nature was not uncommon, noting

that "a sensitivity . . . heightened into an awareness of slavery as a brutal social system often existed simultaneously with a rejection of the humanity of slaves as brute creatures. A display of finer feelings worked to affirm the superiority of white sensibilities, and of white people as a group, over and above the slaves who were constructed as being incapable of harboring feelings or of generating grief" (28). Apparent benevolence of The Garners is based upon the fact that they are not ultra abusive--the harsh reality that they owned slaves, broke apart families and friendships for profit, is mitigated by the viciousness of schoolteacher.

Mrs. Garner is very much like Amy Denver in that her treatment of Sethe is benign, and at times wonderful, but again, she is seen as altruistic in contrast to the horrific expectations established by schoolteacher. In another situation her treatment would be classified as merely human decency. The Garners may be discounted because they are slave owners; they obviously perpetuate the system. Amy Denver's racism can also be tolerated given her ignorance, but the Bodwins present an altogether more complex problem.

The Bodwins are abolitionists, freedom-fighters, and they think they are anti-racists. Although the Bodwins are individuals who help Baby Suggs and Sethe, they are narcissistic. Mr. Bodwin's recollection that "nothing since [his participation in the abolitionist movement] was as

stimulating as the old days of letters, petitions, meetings, debates, recruitment, quarrels, rescue and downright sedition" reminds him of his past political power (Beloved 260). Much like Mr. Garner, Mr. Bodwin's charitableness to Baby Suggs and her family is merely a byproduct of his desire to entertain himself. He fights for equality for the sheer excitement of it. His outspoken support of the slaves and his dramatic political moves are later replaced with emptiness. He remembers that the "good years . . . full of spit and conviction are gone (Beloved 261). Although the plight of ex-slaves is not resolved, the fanfare of the war is over and Mr. Bodwin's lack of interest for the ex-slaves condemns him as a hypocrite.

He misses the "heady days," the "twenty years ago when the Society was at its height in opposing slavery, it was as though his coloring was itself the heart of the matter" (Beloved 260). He places himself at the center of the struggles instead of the slaves, recalling that "'bleached nigger' was what his enemies called him, and on a trip to Arkansas, some Mississippi rivermen, enraged by the Negro boatmen they competed with, had caught him and shoe-blackened his face and hair" (Beloved 260). Denver tries to rationalize her relationship to the Bodwins but recalls Suggs' comment about all whites: "there was no defense--they could prowl at will, change from one mind to another, and even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry

from what real humans did" (Beloved 243). Baby Suggs' argument with Sethe focuses upon the brother and sisters' hypocrisy:

"They got me out of jail," Sethe once told Baby Suggs.

"They also put you in it," she answered.

"They drove you 'cross the river."

"On my son's back."

"They gave you this house."

"Nobody gave me nothing."

"I got a job from them."

"He got a cook from them, girl."

"Oh, some of them do all right by us."

"And every time it's a surprise, ain't it?"

(Beloved 244)

The Bodwins' unacknowledged racism demonstrates the way the institution of slavery is ingested by the seemingly radical thinkers in Beloved and how it limits the freedom of both the slaves and the owners, and the ex-slaves and their benefactors. The Bodwins are self-proclaimed liberators and fighters for the "good." They work with the underground railroad and outwardly regale in their goodness in the free north. However, their actions undermine and contradict their claimed motivations. The odd way in which Mr. and Miss. Bodwin deal with Baby Suggs and Sethe, in addition the Bodwins' possession of a racist figurine, complicates these

seemingly insignificant characters. The ultimate confirmation of the Bodwin's hypocrisy is exposed by the presence of a hateful statue in their home:

A blackboy's 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 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'. (Beloved 225)

The Bodwins offer a seemingly positive representation of whites; but as their unconscious racism is revealed, they are exposed as supporters of the racist system. Carol Schmutte highlights this same passage stating that the "racist stereotype of the Sambo image ironically undermines the claim of the abolitionist Bodwins to be 'good whitefolks'" (187). The Bodwins are a more problematic representation of white racism than the Garners. It becomes clear the Bodwins "hated slavery only a little more than they hated slaves" (Beloved 137). These conflicted characters have so internalized the institution of slavery

that even when they are outwardly fighting against it, they expose their hidden inward acceptance of the convention. However, Schmudde reminds us that "throughout the novel the Bodwins' actions bring good rather than evil. They provide the newly freed Baby Suggs with a house in exchange for domestic services" and "champions Sethe's cause, gets her out of jail, finds work for her, and allows her to stay in the house after Baby Suggs' death" (187). In fact she warns that to "interpret the Sambo doll in the Bodwins' kitchen as Morrison's objective revelation . . . is to oversimplify her narrative strategy (188). I concur with this reading and suggest that Morrison is emphasizing something more than unconscious racism. She is exposing the power of racism and how it infects and corrodes even the more benevolent characters in the novel.

Because of this influence, the Bodwins break the codes of behavior for self-gratification rather than for self-knowledge. Since these transgressions are internal ruptures of consciousness rather than outwardly delineated acts of revolt, the penalty for their behavior is also meted out internally. The Bodwins are the inverse of Amy Denver. Mr. Bodwin ends up confused about his own decline into mediocrity and nothingness. For all of his transgressive behavior, Mr. Bodwin does not attain self-knowledge or autonomy.

The limitation placed on autonomy within racist

structures is, of course, most powerfully felt by the openly repressed group in Morrison's novel: the slaves. What I find fascinating, as I move my focus to the black characters in Morrison's fiction, is the underlying commonality of experience of the characters struggling for self definition. The necessity to transgress societal or moral laws in attempt to attain autonomy is met with serious, often deadly reprisal. The slaves who try to escape the Sweet Home Plantation--Sethe, Halle, Paul D, and Sixo--transgress the slavery codes and meet with reprisals; however, unlike the white characters explored above, some of these characters develop autonomy. Obviously, the attempt to leave the farm is a major act of crime and the retaliation for this act is equally weighty. The codes broken and the payment exacted are clear cut; however, the significant question is whether this development is worth the cost. With Beloved Morrison describes the horrors of slavery in vivid detail and with such passion that the cruelty and injustice of the institution is an undeniable reality. It is no longer historical fact or cultural record. By "reenacting the anguish of Margaret Garner, the slave woman" (Harris, Solo 12), and turning her life into the character Sethe's immediate, palpable reality, Morrison re-creates the utter inhumanity of the slave system. The story accents cruelty with several distinct images.

The softest depiction is the schoolroom where the

character of schoolteacher instructs his nephews on the human and animal characteristics of the slaves. These boys have divided their notebooks into columns to list the statistics they have gathered under their uncle's tutelage. It is this labeling process that underlies Sethe's choice to remove her children from Sweet Home and slavery. Telling Denver about the schoolteacher's instructions to his nephews and his investigations of slaves she explains, "it was a book about us but we didn't know that right away. We just thought it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said. I still think it was them questions that tore Sixo up. Tore him up for all time" (Beloved 158). Sixo is not the only one completely shaken by this book of human and animal features. It is the fear of this book and its application to her children that inspires Sethe and Halle to run because "no one, no body on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper . . . Sethe had refused--and refused still (Beloved 251). Her desire to break out of the codified system labeling her an animal yields horrific recompense.

Moving forward into the horror of slavery, and the second event contributing to Sethe's ultimate act of infanticide, is the image of the six month pregnant Sethe being milked like a cow and suckled by the young boys: "Two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other

holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up " (Beloved 71). After this humiliation, which Sethe invokes time and time again with the refrain--almost chant-like--"they stole my milk," she is beaten. Paul D remembers the sequence of events and believes that "when [Sethe] told Mrs. Garner, they took down the cowhide" (Beloved 229). Carving out a hole in the ground to protect the maturing livestock in her womb, they then carve out a "tree" on her back with their whips. Added to this illustration, Morrison places pictures of men in shackles, men hanging from trees, men being burned by slow fire, women in fields days after childbirth, children being ripped from their mother's embraces, and men going mad at the sight of their women being abused.

Utilizing Julia Kristeva's work, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Blount suggests that "what we witness during the beating of the young slave [in Delany's novel Blake] is the revelation of the abject. The very process by which the humanity of the black subject is denied, the violence by which the distinction between the human and animal/object gives way, leads to an awareness . . . [that he] exists outside of the subject/object binarism altogether" (82). This is certainly the case in Beloved. The ability for schoolteacher 1) to mark down and teach the animal characteristics of the Sweet Home slaves 2) to beat the full-term pregnant Sethe 3) to beat then murder Sixo 4)

to compare the maddened, blood-drenched murderous Sethe to an ill trained horse, clearly demonstrates Blount and Kristeva's hypotheses of the "ambiguous opposition I/Other, Inside/Outside" subject position. Schoolteacher is so utterly convinced of the animal qualities of the slaves, in contrast to his own humanity, that he can completely detach himself from the pain and torment that he inflicts. Of note also, this attitude is held by Amy Denver, and it is precisely this ideology that prevents her from violating her role, yet condemns schoolteacher. Because of schoolteacher's complete adherence to the cultural codes of the slavery system he not only avoids transgressing these standards but never even begins to question their veracity.

Morrison details the above events so vividly that the reader applauds Sethe's choice to run from her slave home. Despite her swollen belly and weeping back, despite the fact that all the runaway plans have gone awry, despite the fact that the underground railroad has left without her and she can not find her husband and the other men have been caught, despite all of these mishaps Morrison has so well detailed the torments of slavery that Sethe's suicidal flight to freedom is anxiously cheered by the reader. However, the choice of the slaves to flee from Sweet Home, and thereby rupturing cultural and legal codes, exacts terrific payment: Sixo is hanged, Paul D is collared, and Halle loses his mind.

The final image of horror which Morrison weaves before our eyes is Sethe grabbing her three older children sent ahead to freedom and her new-born infant. She drags them into a woodshed and draws a saw across the necks of the two boys and the older girl. She also attempts to crack the skull of the infant girl against the wall of the shed because the glimpse Sethe sees of schoolteacher, his milk robbing nephew, and the slave retrieving sheriff invoke all the horror that a runaway slave would meet upon her return.

Explaining the impetus for Beloved, Morrison, in an interview with Bill Moyers, states that Margaret Garner "was a slave woman who escaped from Kentucky and arrived in Cincinnati to live with her mother-in-law. Right after she got there the man who owned her found her. She ran out into the shed and tried to kill all her children" (272). Morrison goes on to explain that Garner "became a cause celebre for the abolitionist . . . she was tried for the 'real' crime, which was stolen property, and convicted and returned to that same man" (272).

Sethe's desire to permanently remove her children from the clutches of slavery and the definitions making them either human or animal are understood--not applauded--but understood. When Paul D hears what Sethe has done to keep her children from slavery, he asks her if she has four feet instead of two. This insult, paralleling schoolteacher's questions, not only implies that she is an animal but also

that she loved her children wrongly. Stamp Paid, trying to make amends for exposing Sethe's past, explains that "she ain't crazy. She love those children. She was trying to outhurt the hurter" (Beloved 234). In her article Susan Babbitt also suggests that Sethe's transgression is a painful yet positive move towards autonomy, stating:

It looks as though to the extent that we think that Sethe was not just crazy when she acted as she did, that there were good reasons for her actions, it is because we see her action as a certain sort of becoming, defined as better or worse in terms of a process with a certain direction, namely, the pursuit of self-respect, dignity, and personal integrity. Sethe struggles for understanding of a situation with certain, very definite structural features, one of which is its denial of dignity and respect to African American people. (14)

Yet Sethe does claim her autonomy through this transgressive act. Sethe is by far the most transgressive character in the novel and therefore suffers the most. As R. W. Connell notes, according "to Sartre, being in a position to choose also means having to take responsibility--in a famous phrase, 'We are condemned to be free'. The act of choice also means the fact of commitment. We are stuck with what we do; what's done cannot be undone. To make a choice is to

walk into a future defined by the consequences of that choice" (211). With this in mind, it is clear that Sethe is ready to take responsibility for her actions. She does not shirk either the ghost or the later manifestation of her daughter, Beloved, when she comes to her home.

Sethe is the only slave who eventually succeeds in running from Sweet Home. After the botched link-up to the Underground railroad, which does take Sethe and Halle's three children to freedom, the five recaptured adult slaves are physically and mentally tortured. Significantly, Sethe's act of infanticide is not her only action demanding reprisal. Dayle B. DeLancy notes that "infanticide among African-American slaves was not unusual, and there are many recorded accounts of enslaved women battering their children's heads against the sides of slave ships during the Middle Passage in order to spare them from lives of servitude" (18). Therefore, Sethe's pays for rupturing several slave culture codes as well as the dominant cultural codes--further discussed in Chapter II--with the life of one child, estrangement from the remaining three, loss of her social status, haunting from her daughter/ghost Beloved, and the near loss of her sanity and life. Babbitt believes that "Sethe, in fact, struggles for autonomy, and does to some degree achieve it. At least, she manages to acquire for herself the capacity to deliberate about her situation in a way that better reflects her real interests" (5). Babbitt

continues, "if autonomy is, as some have said, that which makes agency possible, Sethe acquires autonomy. Indeed, what explains Sethe's attempt to kill her children is, in part, her experience of having decided to leave Sweet Home with her children and having carried it out" (5).

The various men from the plantation have differing degrees of resistance to the slavery system. Halle tries to subvert the codes by obeying the rules and struggling to buy his family's freedom with his spare-time work earnings. Reprisal for circumventing the system in this way is severe. His erroneous view of his status within slavery is rapidly and violently corrected by schoolteacher. It is at this point, as Lori Askeland notes, that "the limits of their domain and the degree to which they had been isolated in Mr. Garner's 'wonderful lie' become clear" (792). Halle realizes he will be unable to continue working for money to buy his family's freedom. This limit on his ability to protect and liberate his family is acutely painful. Then Halle's situation becomes dramatically worse. Halle's suffering ultimately culminates in madness and ineffectualness as he impotently watches his wife being beaten and violated by schoolteacher and his two nephews. Paul D describes the last time he had seen Halle, and Sethe pictures him "squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind" (Beloved 71).

Sixo's resistance takes a completely different form. After the arrival of schoolteacher, Sixo, the indigo man, gives up learning first numbers and then the language of his American owners. Sixo is the only true African on the farm. The rest have been born into slavery. His rootedness, to borrow Morrison's term, frightens the other Sweet Home men:

Sixo went among the trees at night. For dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open, he said. Privately, alone, he did it. None of the rest of them had seen him at it, but they could imagine it, and the picture they made them eager to laugh at him--in daylight, that is, when it was safe. But that was before he stopped speaking English because there was no future in it."

(Beloved 25)

He is also the only one, prior to the attempted run, to break the rules of Sweet Home. He secretly leaves the farm to meet "Patsy the Thirty-Mile Woman (24)," and the victory of his audacity is he remains spiritually alive. Upon his recapture, as he is being slowly burnt to death, he is able to shout out "Seven-O! Seven-O!" (Beloved 228) in honor of the child his woman is carrying on to freedom in her womb.

Paul D's transgressions are manifold, and like the others he is physically and mentally punished for his attempt to run from the plantation. His situation is more stirring than the other male characters' in the novel

because he tells of his inner turmoil, his weighing and measuring of his own humanity in the prison of Alfred, Georgia. Paul D's struggle to reconcile his inner view with the external codes placed upon him first as a slave then as a prisoner do lead him to self-knowledge and a modicum of autonomy.

None of the characters analyzed in this novel are resoundingly successful in their fight for self-conceptualization. Too easily can the characters of the Bodwins and the Garners be regarded as purely positively motivated. With equal ease, Sethe's actions can be condemned and the struggles of Halle, Six-O, and Paul D can be interpreted one dimensionally. To avoid this, Terry Otten succinctly explains that in Beloved Morrison describes

evil as all-encompassing, evident not just in the overt sadism of many Southern whites (which is, after all, a fact of history) but also in the "banality of evil," to use Hannah Arendt's phrase, in the "nice Nazi" nature of the kindly slave-owners the Garners and even more in the potential for evil within the black community itself. Evil persists in the "meanness" of the blacks who refuse to warn Sethe about the white men come to reclaim her, in the well-intended Stamp Paid's betrayal of Sethe's past, in Paul D's cowardly retreat, and most profoundly, in Sethe's criminal

love itself. (82)

With this definition, Otten highlights the complexity of Morrison's characters. Springing from this, I find that applying the trope of crime and punishment, evoking Dostoyevsky's redemptive quality, to measure the self-development of characters as they struggle within the slavery system described in Beloved highlights the multifaceted nature of Morrison's writing. It is with this novel, with this painful, bloody, ghost-ridden novel that Morrison's use of the slave history in America and the reprisals meted out for transgressing its laws are most obvious. This novel presents the manifestations of racism and how this model impinges upon the personal freedom of both the slaves, the slave owners, workers on the underground railroad, and other individuals coming in contact with slavery. The above sections deal specifically with the institution of slavery in Beloved. Because the novel's setting stems from 1850 until 1874, and hints at the larger past encompassing the middle passage, it deals directly with slavery, whereas in my next section discussing Song of Solomon it is the legacy of slavery and its restrictions which the characters of Macon Dead and his son Milkman must transgress.

Section II: "Race and Class Divisions in Song of Solomon"

In Song of Solomon, Morrison develops characters who also develop a cogent sense of self by breaking the patterns expected of them and withstanding the reprisals exacted for their independent behavior. The ramifications of slavery are clearly demonstrated by the Dead family men, problems Cornell West defines as "black invisibility and namelessness" (80). He suggests "this basic predicament exists on at least four levels--existential, social, political, and economic. The existential level is the most relevant here because it has to do with what it means to be a person and live a life under the horrifying realities of racist assault" (80). Each of these elements are grappled with by the characters in Song of Solomon, with specific emphasis on existential development. Transgression of limitations imposed by the dominant culture is the means to attaining selfhood. The character of Milkman Dead struggles for just this autonomy.

Racism has a tremendous impact upon the development of the extended Dead family. Cynthia Davis insists that

all of Morrison's characters exist in a world defined by its blackness and by the surrounding white society that both violates and denies it. The destructive effect of the white society can take the form of outright physical violence, but oppression in Morrison's world is more often

psychic violence. She rarely depicts white characters, for the brutality here is less a single act than the systematic denial of the reality of black lives. (323)

Hence, Macon's father, the original Macon Dead (Jake), is only the first victim in a long series of discrimination. He is a freed slave who manages to acquire land which eventually makes a profit. He sets up his farm in the post war days of the 1800's. His act of transgression is to follow the rules and do too well--he beats the white man at his own game. The beauty and profitability of the farm he created out of the woods inspires jealousy of the white locals. Unwittingly, he signs a paper allowing the white men to claim his land. The day the men come to take possession he resists them, and the reprisal for his rebellion is that they "shoot him five feet in the air" (Beloved 52). The strength of the white power structure is proven in the ability of these men to steal land from freed blacks. However, the original Macon Dead is a man admired by all the other black men, and is a man who feels his own worth. For him, the autonomy is worth the price.

This background explains the second Macon's preoccupation with the acquisition of wealth. He desires to prove his equality, striving to possess land and to recoup the losses his father unjustly suffered. His goal, which pushes all other pursuits out of his mind, is seen by other

blacks as embracing the white ideal. His desire to become wealthy and powerful is his method of retaliation at the white power structure. Unfortunately, because Macon's fight is an individual effort, which uses the blacks around him as cannon fodder, he is seen as an enemy and a traitor. Susan Willis states that "throughout Morrison's writing, the white world is equated with the bourgeois class--its ideology and lifestyle. This is true of Song of Solomon, where Macon Dead's attitudes toward rents and property make him more 'white' than 'black'" (in Gates, Black Literature, 264).

Unlike and yet like his father, the second Macon Dead hews out an existence in a racist world. The difference is the transgressions of the second Macon Dead yield him none of the personal rewards gained by his father. His offenses are manifold and, very much like his father, his monetary success infringes upon racist codes. He obeys all of the rules of business and white society. Along with Halle in Beloved, Sidney in Tar Baby, and Jude in Sula, Macon is caught within a societal structure condemning him for adherence to the societal rules.

These four men define and attain success according to the structures of the dominant society. And for this, they are considered slightly Uncle Tom-ish by the other blacks around them and are later punished for compliance and loyalty to the dominant culture. They pay for these

violations. The reprisals are meted out by both the whites who abhor them for being black and the blacks who scorn them for being white-like.

The people in Macon Dead's town detest him, whereas the elder Macon Dead is idolized by the men who knew him long ago. The younger Macon inspires fear and derision and the elder evokes hope and awe. This difference is based upon the fact that the younger Macon is a clear representation of the racist model ingested by a black character. On the other hand, the elder Macon was successful, but he made his success out of his own sweat. In contrast his son, Macon, makes his profit off the backs of his workers and tenants. Not only is Macon II as bad as the white people in the book, he becomes one of them. Guitar, Milkman's childhood friend, sees this aspect in Macon--and hates him for it. He forever recalls his grandmother's admonition: "A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see. A terrible, terrible thing to see" (Song 22).

This second Macon is a social climber highly conscious of social position and skin tone. The actions which ultimately cause him to suffer reprisal are those that too closely emulate the white cultural values. His choice of a fair-skinned wife yields him misery. Macon recounts his courtship with Ruth and describes the tension felt between himself and Ruth's father, Dr. Foster. Money and status are Dr. Foster's chief concerns, an attitude which Macon defines

as being deeply racist: "Negroes in this town worshipped him. He didn't give a damn about them, though. Called them cannibals. He delivered both your sisters himself and each time all he was interested in was the color of their skin. He would have disowned you [Milkman]" (Song 71). Macon elaborates the Fosters' superior view of themselves, suggesting the crux of his marital problems develop from his wife's prejudice. Macon believes that Ruth's snobbery is what leads her to develop a bizarre fascination for her father, a suspicion confirmed when Macon found her "in the bed . . . laying next to him. Naked as a yard dog, Kissing him. Him dead and white and puffy and skinny, and she had his fingers in her mouth" (Song 73). It is difficult to decipher which is more damaging, Ruth's actions or the motivation behind her actions.

The elder Macon also married a light skinned woman, Singing Bird, whose family disapproved of her love for an ex-slave. This first couple chose to take off together at the end of the war and create a life away from parental disapproval. In fact, Singing Bird--probably a native American--convinces the elder Macon Dead to keep the ridiculous name given to him by an incompetent clerk in order to avoid her family's discovery. Although "she always bragged how she was never a slave. Her people neither" (Song 243), the brief account given of her indicates a woman far removed from the twisted Ruth Foster. Morrison includes

the struggles of other oppressed racial groups with the character of Singing Bird, and the tribes Paul D encounters on his blooming run North. Through these characters, Morrison connects different aspects of American history in her novel. She uses the power of the oral tradition as well as the African legends of the Flying Africans in Song of Solomon and the Blind Horsemen in Tar Baby. These images trace earlier stolen men and women of Africa. And Singing Bird is the first of the many transgressive women in Song of Solomon.

In contrast to his parents' marriage, Macon's marriage is a disaster. Macon does not gain personal autonomy. His striving for money and interaction with white businessmen alienate him from the black community and continue his estrangement from his sister, Pilate. Completely focused upon the external, he criticizes Pilate's manner of dress asking her "Why can't you dress like a woman? . . . What's that sailor's cap doing on your head? Don't you have stockings?" (Beloved 20). Because he is afraid of her reflection upon his hard earned respectability he demands to know "What are you trying to make me look like in this town?" (Beloved 20). When he thinks of the town he means the white businessmen. His devotion to the power structure makes him vulnerable:

He trembled with the thought of the white men in the bank--the men who helped him buy and mortgage

houses--discovering that this raggedy bootlegger was his sister. That the propertied Negro who handled his business so well and who lived in the big house on Not Doctor Street had a sister who had a daughter but no husband, and that daughter had a daughter but no husband. A collection of lunatics who made wine and sang in the streets "like common street women! Just like common street women!" (Song 21).

Macon is ruled by his allegiance to the codes of the middle class. This middle class ideal is what keeps him lurking outside of Pilate's window rather than entering. Sadly, "he wanted no conversation, no witness, only to listen and perhaps to see the three of them, the source of that music that made him think of fields and wild turkey and calico" (Song 29). Although he "felt himself softening under the weight of memory and music" (Song 29) he does not enter, he can not enter. Macon's inculcation of racist ideals is probably only outstripped by Dr. Foster's adherence to racist codes. And Foster's success is what draws Macon to Ruth Foster.

Because Macon is so invested with acquisition of wealth, he believes his properties are what win him everything, including his wife. Theodore Mason states that "to avoid his father's fate--a violent death--Macon tries to create a similar story chronicling possession and ownership,

but with a different ending. Macon says to Milkman, 'Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too' (55). Ownership is his mode of defense against the depredations of an intrinsically antagonistic white world" (571). Therefore, "the first time he called on Ruth Foster's father" Macon remembers that "it was because of those keys that he could dare to walk over to that part of Not Doctor street . . . and approach the most important Negro in the city. To lift the lion's paw knocker, to entertain thoughts of marrying the doctor's daughter was possible because each key represented a house which he owned at the time (Song 22). Because of those keys and Macon's heavy reliance on societal markers of success, he never unearths the real reason Dr. Foster encouraged his relationship with Ruth.

That fond as he was of his only child, . . . he had begun to chafe under her devotion. Her steady beam of love was unsettling, and she had never dropped those expressions of affection that had been so lovable in her childhood. The good-night kiss was itself a masterpiece of slow-wittedness on her part and discomfort on his. At sixteen, she still insisted on having him come to her at night, sit on her bed, exchange a few pleasantries, and plant a kiss on her lips. Perhaps it was the loud silence of his dead wife.

Perhaps it was Ruth's disturbing resemblance to her mother. More probably it was the ecstasy that always seemed to be shining in Ruth's face when he bent to kiss her--an ecstasy he felt inappropriate to the occasion. (Song 23)

Unaware of the Doctor's desire to find his daughter a husband, any husband, Macon believes it is his money and reputation that wins Ruth's hand. And later, had Macon been more liberated, he would have been able to leave his wife upon finding her sucking the fingers of her dead father. Instead, he tolerates the underlying insecurities of his children's parentage in order to maintain appearances. Ruth's oddities in regard to both her father and her son are left predominantly ignored by Macon, which not only destroys their marriage but warps their children. Macon is unable to focus upon these issues because of his over adherence to stereotypes that lead him to a false life.

Driving his new car through the streets on his ritual Sunday family outings is emblematic of his view of the world. No one enjoys these trips. The children are dressed up and uncomfortable, and he and Ruth continually argue. Yet Macon insists on these drives because it fits his image of the perfect upwardly mobile family checking out property in Honore, the lake front property owned by wealthy blacks. The attitude of the townspeople toward Macon and his car, perfectly depicted in this scene, emphasizes the sham:

"Macon's wide green Packard belied what they thought a car was for. He never went over twenty miles an hour, never gunned his engine, never stayed in first gear for a block or two to give pedestrians a thrill . . . he never . . . never . . . never . . . so they called it Macon Dead's Hearse" (Song 33). Mason recognizes that "the metaphor of the automobile is especially important since the car and the ride as well are elements in a story woven by Macon Dead . . . but the car is the primary symbol in that tale--aside from the keys and the houses--becomes disabling for Milkman rather than enabling, turning into a symbol of imprisonment and limitation" (572).

This scene, like the ones cited above, demonstrate Macon's lack of self-awareness. Like the female characters I shall discuss in Chapter II, Macon strives so desperately to fulfill unrealistic expectations that he destroys himself. His control of his family, especially the women, focuses entirely on outward considerations rather than internal awareness. Elizabeth House suggests the poverty of self-fulfillment in the Macon Dead's family is one way that "Morrison affirms the superiority of idyllic values over competitive-success ones; she clearly details the negative consequences of valuing power or wealth more than other people" (181).

In following Macon's progress, House notes that because he is "dispossessed of the Georgia farm and its peaches,

Macon grows up determined to beat the white men at their power game, to achieve the sweet American dream of being rich and powerful. This feat he accomplishes by crafty buying of property. He becomes a landlord for much of the black community, a trusted customer of white bankers, and the husband of Ruth Foster, daughter of the town's most eminent black doctor. All these successes do not bring Macon supreme happiness" (194). Although House states that Macon is not supremely happy, and wittily states that "as his name suggests, the man is "makin' death" rather than life as he accumulates more and more wealth" (195), I believe there is more to Macon's psychology than her suggestion that "his obsessive need for money and power, his desire for upward mobility at any cost, combine to make Macon a man who has no close human ties (House 195). Macon's inability to break out of the structure established by the dominant culture has a deeper cause than House suggests and a far greater impact. Macon is completely bereft of love, passion, friends, and family--he has no self-concept and he can impart nothing to his children other than emptiness and self-loathing.

The gaps I find in House's reading become clearer when discussing the third and final Macon Dead, hereafter referred to as Milkman. Jumping ahead to Milkman's adulthood and his quest for gold in the south, House states that "at first Milkman had felt he was acting

altruistically, gaining revenge for his grandfather's loss; he had 'thought he wanted in the name of Macon Dead's Georgia peaches . . . ' (p. 257) but suddenly, he 'knew that all the fine reasons for wanting it didn't mean a thing. The fact was he wanted the gold because it was gold and he wanted to own it. Free' (p. 257). For the first time, Milkman realizes that he is acting out of his father's competitive success motives" (House 196). Although these passages do link up Milkman's development, I think House has misconstrued exactly what Milkman is thinking at this point and what Morrison is trying to convey. His desire to obtain the money is no longer about the money for the money's sake. It is what it represents for Milkman--freedom--and that freedom is freedom from the control and ambitions of his father. Milkman is hell bent on disentangling himself from the various images of manhood and race equality offered by his father and Guitar. His attitude about the money continues to change as he goes further and further along his path in the South.

In order to trace this development clearly, I return to the breastfeeding boy/child Milkman and the moment Freddie "brought his rent to the doctor's house late one day and looked in the window past the evergreen" and "Ruth jumped up as quickly as she could and covered her breast, dropping her son on the floor and confirming for him what he had begun to suspect--that these afternoon's were strange and wrong (14).

This event gives Milkman his name, a name which his father "guessed, with the accuracy of a mind sharpened by hatred, that the name he heard schoolchildren call his son . . . was not clean. . . . It sounded dirty, intimate, and hot. He knew that wherever the name came from, it had something to do with his wife and was, like the emotion he always felt when thinking of her, coated with disgust" (Song 16). This event not only gives Milkman this burdensome name, which Macon then connects to the "disgust and the uneasiness with which he regarded his son," but comes up again much later in life when Milkman is struggling for self conceptualization.

The second important event repeated from childhood to adulthood is the desire to fly. When Milkman "discovered, at four, . . . that only birds and airplanes could fly--he lost all interest in himself. To have to live without that single gift saddened him and left his imagination so bereft that he appeared dull even to the women who did not hate his mother" (Song 9). At the end of the novel, Milkman discovers his link to the flying-Africans of legend. With these two early events, Milkman begins his search for self.

Milkman is the main focus of this section, as well as Morrison's novel, because his search for autonomy brings him through several distinct stages. At each point he transgresses codes dictating behavior, suffers various forms of reprisal, and gains self-awareness through his actions. Unlike the other characters in Morrison's novels I discuss,

Milkman is the single character who develops a concrete understanding of his position in the world.

Milkman's personality is strongly influenced by his father, Macon Dead. Affected by his father's reactionary attitude Milkman, in turn, reacts to the situation suffered by his father. Although he works for him, Milkman rejects his father's values. A substantial amount of Milkman's development is dependent upon understanding the dynamics of his father's value system. Willis states that for Macon "all human relationships have become fetishized by their being made equivalent to money: His wife is an acquisition; his son, and investment in the future; and his renters, dollar signs in the bank" (in Gates, Black Literature, 272). In dealing with his parentage, Milkman struggles to adjust to both the open and covert effects of racism. Adulthood, for Milkman, is a process whereby racism and classism must be acknowledged and placed into proper perspective.

Milkman's struggle to be free of the middle-class restrictions and expectations held by both his parents enlarges his adolescent search for identity. His struggle is also a rejection of white standards. The contempt Milkman feels for his father's line of work is anchored in his desire to refute the business practices of whites. Macon's operation is seen by the black community as a sell-out and Milkman suffers because of the town-people's dislike of his father. He is thrown out of Feather's pool hall

because of his notorious father. Although Guitar, his best friend, protests that "he can't help who his daddy is," Milkman finds it necessary to distinguish his identity from his father (Beloved 57). To do this he must reject the goals Macon establishes.

In his attempt to attain autonomy, the attitudes held by his mother are also rejected by Milkman. His refusal to become a doctor is not simply disinterest in the medical profession. It is a condemnation of his mother as well as the white power structure. Milkman's rejection of the medical profession can be seen as a retaliation against an unjust system, a system that forbade his grandfather from practicing medicine in an all white hospital.

The external conflicts of the racist and discriminatory society are replicated in his home environment, which is steeped in racial and class consciousness. In a pivotal scene Milkman punches his father to stop him from beating his mother. This event has deep emotional underpinnings and prompts several disclosures for which the childish Milkman is unprepared. The struggle is not simply Milkman's protection of his mother. More significantly, it is the struggle of son against father, and the class each represents. Macon's designates himself as a representative of the upper class black community. His car and his home in Honore manifest his aspirations, whereas, Milkman places himself below this level. He tries to align himself with

the working class, and at times the poverty stricken, represented by Hospital Tommy and the men at the Barber shop. The class conflict between Macon and Milkman is also replicated by the other Dead children. Lena and Corinthians Dead demonstrate serious emotional insecurities because of these class pressures; however, Milkman is the focus for my discussion.

The primary way Milkman develops a solid sense of self is through his trip to the South. He suffers physical hardships in the South, reprisals for his citified ways and too soft shoes. This trip signifies Milkman's reeducation. Reeducation of adult men takes place in several of Morrison's novels. The most striking comparison is to Beloved's male slaves who are reeducated by schoolteacher. However, Son in Tar Baby and Plum in Sula are also forced into manhood. Milkman does several small things wrong when he enters the South, all are breaches of etiquette.

He unconsciously flaunts his wealth when his car needs repair and he is completely mystified by the reactions of the people he encounters. "Milkman knew he had said something else wrong, although he didn't know what. He only knew that they behaved as if they'd been insulted" (Song 266). He offends one man by offering to pay for a coke and a lift into town--and he doesn't ask for or offer his name. He is also too direct in asking for a whore--it is a small town where the women are known, whore or not. Because of

Milkman's manner the men "looked with hatred at the city Negro who could buy a car as if it were a bottle of whiskey because the one he had was broken. And what's more, who had said so in front of them. He hadn't bothered to say his name, nor ask theirs, had called them "them," and would certainly despise their days . . . He hadn't found them fit enough or good enough to want to know their names, and believed himself too good to tell them his (Song 266). These infractions culminate in an argument, then fight, with a man in the drug store. The beating is a reprisal for his earlier deficiency of forgetting, or having never known, the way to interact with strangers and how to show respect.

The reward for holding his own in the fight is Milkman's acceptance into a fraternal society. Before "they looked at his skin and saw it was black as theirs, but they knew he had the heart of the white men who came to pick them up . . . when they need anonymous, faceless laborers" (266), now he is invited on a hunt. Milkman becomes linked to nature when he eats the cougar's heart, and he becomes linked to his heritage through the men who show him where he came from. He is also introduced to Sweet, the woman with whom he has an authentic sexual experience. The relevancy of these things is that Milkman discovers a way in which to actualize himself outside the class parameters established by his father and Guitar.

Susan Willis's work supports this reading, stating that

"in tracing his roots from the Detroit ghetto, where he was familiar with Pilate's version of the Solomon song; to Danville, Pennsylvania, where his father grew up; and then to Shalimar, West Virginia, where his grandfather was born and children still sing of Solomon, Milkman deciphers the twin texts of history; song and genealogy" (in Gates, Black Literature, 271). Willis continues to utilize this concept of individuality in contrast to aloneness, suggesting that "novels may focus on individual characters like Milkman and Jadine, but the salvation of individuals is not the point. Rather these individuals, struggling to reclaim or redefine themselves, are portrayed as epiphenomenal to community and culture; and it is the strength and continuity of the black cultural heritage as a whole which is at stake and being tested" (in Gates, Black Literature, 270). Consequently, my discussion of Milkman's development focuses upon his violation of race and class codes, and the autonomy he attains through these ruptures.

Milkman's reeducation takes several forms, many of which have magical qualities that ultimately culminate in his leap. One such experience transpires when he encounters Circe. She is an impossibly old woman, "so old she was colorless. So old only her mouth and eyes were distinguishable features in her face" (Song 241). Circe would have been the same age as Milkman's grandfather--had he lived. She is living in the rotten and falling Butler

house that "looked like a murder's house. Dark, ruined, evil" (Song 239). Mr. Butler was the man who killed the original Macon Dead, and it is in this house that the orphaned Pilate and Macon Dead II hid until they ran. Circe is the same woman who pierces Pilate's ear and constructs the box/earring that contains Pilate's name.

Circe lives in the house as an act of revenge. She rejoices in the decay of the home: "The only reason I'm here alone is because [Mrs. Butler] died. She killed herself. All the money was gone, so she killed herself. Stood right there on the landing where you were a minute ago and threw herself off the banister" (Song 244). Circe explains to Milkman that "she saw the work I did all her days and died, you hear me, died rather than live like me. Now, what do you suppose she thought I was! If the way I lived and the work I did was so hateful to her she killed herself to keep from having to do it, and you think I stay on here because I loved her, then you have about as much sense as a fart!" (Song 247). Circe's revenge, her retaliation against Mrs. Butler and the racist system, is to allow the house to go rank with the smell of urine from the dogs and rot with age and neglect. However, I am unsure if her retaliation is worth living her life out in such horrific conditions. In order to exact her revenge, she offers up her freedom.

Interestingly, Circe confuses Milkman with Macon upon seeing him. Although he corrects her, and informs her that

he is her Macon's son, the error has resonance. This type of situation is replicated in Morrison's other novels. I believe the error in identity is extremely significant for the characters struggling for autonomy and self-definition. In all of the instances of confusion the characters who are mistaken for someone else learn they share qualities that were before unacknowledged. In Sula, Nel enters the old folks' home to visit the aged Eva Peace. Eva confuses the two woman. In both of these novels the elder woman's confusion creates an awareness of commonality between the people. In Nel it provokes a crisis of loss--having lost Sula, whom she rejected even at her death bed, she has lost herself. In Milkman the confusion of identities allows him to see his father's life and success in a much more favorable light, and allows him to see their similarities.

Also interesting in this scene is the parallel to Beloved. Hearing his father's story again, with renewed details and understanding, Milkman is able to imagine his father's life for the first time. Something similar happens when Denver retells her mother's story to her sister/ghost Beloved. As she lets the story unfold, telling the details she knows by heart, she becomes aware, also for the first time, of exactly what her mother survived.

These instances are important because they mitigated the reprisals Denver, Nel, and Milkman's suffer. By gaining this insight, this commonality, this newfound bond, the

estranged transgressors are invited back: Nel with her cry "Girl, oh, girl," Denver with her step off the porch and her provisions for Sethe, and Milkman with his renewed vigor to find the gold and make his father proud.

Milkman's transgression of many different codes leads him to a unique understanding of his place within the cosmos. He discovers a method for dealing with the racist codes that have bound him. David Cowart believes that "like Faulkner's Lucas McCaslin, who also looks for buried treasure, Milkman must renounce this potentially corrupting cupidity to achieve the wholeness attendant on self-knowledge and maturity" and goes on to suggest that "Milkman recovers a 'treasure' in the form of a lost past, a lost myth, a lost name" (90-91). No longer is he struggling between the representations of his father or of Guitar. He becomes much more in synch with the view of Pilate. Although the novel is primarily a novel about men and their struggles to comprehend their place in the world, one female figure is pivotal in race relations in Song of Solomon. This woman is Pilate. Pilate holds a unique position and has an unqualified view of her value in the cosmos. Pilate does not merely transgress the codes of black and white society, she transcends them. Even her death is transcendent, as exemplified by the bird who flies off with the earring containing her name.

She is the measuring stick which Milkman uses to

compare his own personal development, and she is the constant reminder to the elder Macon Dead of his personal failure.

Complicated because she refuses to follow any established rules, Pilate stands outside of the parameters of racism and middle class values. Brenda Marshall explains that "Pilate is outside society, often outside the laws of man, and seemingly outside the laws of nature, and yet she is the most reliable commentator on society, man, and nature. Because she is outside the norm she must at times take on roles to conform to society's expectations, and she is so easily protean because of her total alienation from any of these recognizable roles or identities" (486).

The only one who is irritated by her social stance is Guitar. He is disgusted with her ability to manipulate the officials at the police station in order to bail him out of trouble. He dismissively calls it an "Aunt Jemima" act. Guitar becomes enmeshed in the vigilante mentality of the Seven days, and believes that Pilate has conspired with Milkman to rob him of the gold in the Shalimar cave. And it is ultimately Guitar who kills her for what he mistakenly believes to be a double-cross.

The figure of Guitar Bains is another option to the repressive system of racist segregation. This character's answer is to join the group called The Seven Days who enact Hamarabbie's code of an "eye for an eye" revenge. Cornell

West maintains that "the two major choices in black culture (or any culture) facing those who succumb to the temptation of hate are a self-hatred that leads to self destruction or a hatred of others--degraded others--that leads to vengeance of some sort: These options often represent two sides of the same coin" (95). Guitar, unfortunately, represents this response to the oppression he suffers.

Milkman's friendship with Guitar lends further insight into his personality. The two boys are inseparable friends in their youth but begin to find it difficult to maintain their friendship as their lives progress. Arranging time to see one another, once Milkman begins to work, becomes problematic. When they are together they find themselves preoccupied with different facets of their separate lives. Their estrangement becomes ever more apparent. When the incestuous activities described by Macon trigger Milkman's recollection of his own suppressed past, he is horrified. In the midst of a flood of memories, Milkman states to himself: "My mother nursed me when I was old enough to talk, stand up, and wear knickers, and somebody saw it and laughed and --and that is why they call me Milkman and that is why my father never does and that is why my mother never does, but everybody else does. And how did I forget that? And why?" (78). Milkman is devastated by recalling this appalling fact and searches out Guitar to turn to with his troubles.

He finds Guitar in the barber shop, engrossed in the discussion of the murder of an African American man, Emmitt Till. When Milkman gets Guitar alone he tries to explain his problem, but the conversation keeps reverting back to the injustice done to Till. It is not until Milkman exclaims, "well fuck Till. I'm the one in trouble" (88) that Milkman is able to command Guitar's attention. Even then, Milkman is handed platitudes belittling the seriousness of his situation. A further demonstration which shows Guitar's lack of perception into the state of his friend's mind is his refusal to give Milkman a place to sleep.

The rift that develops between these friends, culminating in Guitar's murderous rage, and the distance that grows between Macon and Milkman demonstrate Milkman's physical and psychological movement away from both men. Milkman develops a unique response to the racially codified system that ensnares the characters in Song of Solomon. He rejects the sycophantic emulation of white culture of Macon and also rejects the vigilante mentality of Guitar. By forsaking both these options, and risking his life in the process, Milkman defines himself according to personal, historic, and mystical codes that he unearths in the South.

Chapter II: "Codes of Femininity: What's a Woman to Do?"

This chapter examines the system of retribution enacted against female characters who break stated or implied standards of femininity established by the dominant American culture and replicated in African American culture. Joan Wallach Scott states that "the outcome of prevailing Western systems is a clear division between male and female; 'The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is sperate'" (162). Scott contest that a woman's concept of self is linked to external judgements. I concentrate upon external judgements of femininity according to definitions of absolute beauty and proper motherhood. The problematic position of American women trying to attain value by pursuing beauty codes and/or images of ideal domesticity and motherhood advanced by American society is found in all of Morrison's fiction.

Significantly, these ideals are not limited to members of the dominant culture (middle class white women), but are emulated by members excluded because of status and race (poor and/or working class black women). "Most susceptible [to the corrosive colorist ideology] are black women and girls, who too often anchor their identity on the slippery surface of physical beauty, not realizing the sacrifice of self and family. Those women in Morrison's world who have made western beauty their *raison d'etre* fail to realize that what they strive to be in their search for physical beauty

is the object not necessarily of black male desire, but of white male desire" (Heinze 25). Patricia Hill Collins declares that "black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined image of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other" (94). For my purposes, I center upon this problem of self-actualization for Morrison's characters, black and white, as they struggle against the restrictions of the dominant ideology that demands both beauty and motherhood as fulfillment the model of femininity.

Carol Gilligan discern that "the arc of developmental theory leads from infantile dependence to adult autonomy, tracing a path characterized by an increasing differentiation of self from other and a progressive freeing of thought from contextual constraints" (549). In order for Morrison's female characters to make these necessary steps toward the development of a liberated self, I believe that the codes of femininity outlined, by the dominant culture and supported by the African american culture, as beauty and motherhood, must be ruptured.

Iris Marion Young suggests that 'as a category, then gender differentiation is primarily a phenomenon of symbolic life, in both the individual consciousness and the general metaphysical framework and ideologies of a culture. Psychoanalytic theory of gender is the most adequate theory,

because more than any other type of theory it can make the connections between individual affectivity, motivation, and desire, on the one hand, and the symbolic and categories of culture, on the other" (27). Utilizing psychoanalytical theory, as well as other theories of gender roles, I suggest that it is breaking the codes of externally defined femininity that leads Morrison's female characters toward autonomy.

Just as Toni Morrison's writings denounce the barriers of slavery, segregation, and discrimination, her novels castigate restrictions placed upon women. I investigate paradigms of beauty and motherhood in Morrison's novels, and how these models restrict the movement of the female characters. I also discuss the women who reject these definitions and the price they pay for this autonomy. It is the struggle for this self that necessitates rupturing the externally defined feminine roles presented in Morrison's novels.

Tracing the enforced images of beauty and motherhood in her novels, it is evident that Morrison criticizes the cultural ideals which not only place blackness at the bottom of the beauty standard but also relegate women to the role of motherhood and/or homemaker and then deem this status insignificant. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw queries: "How does the fact that women of color are simultaneously situated within at least two groups that are subjected to

broad societal subordination bear upon problems traditionally viewed as monocausal--that is, gender discrimination or race discrimination?" (248). With this question, Barbara Smith's book title is highlighted, All the Woman are White. All the Blacks are Men. But Some of Us are Brave. In her 1988 work, Smith discusses the problematic position of black women who find that feminism tends gloss over the racial position of black women, and that anti-racist movements tend to overlook the gender position of women of color. The women who are brave wrote in The National Black Feminist Organization Statement of Purpose that "black women have suffered cruelly in this society from living the phenomenon of being black and female, in a country that is both racist and sexist" (in Schneir 173). It is also important to note that with or without children, women are forced into domestic roles and that, according to this code, any link to the art of, or pride in, domestic accomplishment is removed. The women who break from this definition are deemed transgressive and are therefore punished. Yet, just as in my first chapter discussing racist restrictions, it is the transgressive characters who attain autonomy by breaking expectations.

Susan Faludi states that "the beauty industry may seem the most superficial of the cultural institutions participating in the backlash, but its impact on women was, in many respects, the most intimately destructive--to both

female bodies and minds" (203). Feminine beauty, what it means and how it is defined, is a problem for all of Morrison's female characters. Most of the women in Morrison's fiction diligently work to define themselves within a culturally proscribed concept of beauty. This endeavor takes on a forceful, and at times lethal, seriousness. These women are not simply struggling to decide which lipstick, which coat, or which ribbon to wear, they are fighting for self-definition and survival.

Beauty is one of the most codified systems governing women's conception of self-worth. It becomes clear from Morrison's novels that by not meeting the requirements, a woman is left unprotected, unwanted, and unhappy. A fascinating quality to this setup is the women's own belief in the system and participation in their own diminishment, decline, and, at times, destruction.

Importantly, female sexuality is highly codified by the dominant white male culture and breaks from feminine definitions meet with severe reprisals. Similarly, the characters who do not possess ideal feminine traits, or who use their sexuality in ways outside of the proscribed limits of society, meet with various painful ends. This failure, this transgression, of the feminine ideal leads to isolation, madness, and death. Concentrating on the concept of female perfection, the characters themselves, and how they deal with the pressures to conform to and emulate

cultural ideals, it becomes important to consider the ways in which these ideals are disseminated through the American population and how they limit the characters' concept of self and self-worth. Ultimately the characters who circumvent these restrictions and pursue alternative ways of defining themselves as women become self-defined.

Intriguingly, reprisals are enacted by various mechanisms against all the women in these novels, even if they support the external structures. Therefore, in this chapter I discuss the need for Morrison's female characters to transgress external standards codifying femininity.

Section I: "Problematic Motherhood in Beloved"

The culturally proscribed image of femininity is addressed in Beloved. Although the ideal of female beauty is invoked by the developing Denver, the femininity depicted in the image of motherhood is the paradigm I shall use to analyze the female characters in this novel. The primary woman of concern is Sethe whose conceptualization of motherhood is ever changing, but always outside of the parameters set by the Southern slave culture, the dominant free American culture, and the segregated African American community of runaways and free blacks. As a direct result of her rupture of standards of motherhood, Sethe faces the problems of motherhood in slavery, motherhood as infanticide, and motherhood as ghostly possession. In this novel, Sethe does not grapple with beauty or whiteness in order to define her femininity, she struggles with her role as mother.

The view Sethe holds of motherhood breaks societal expectations and she must withstand the various forms of punishment exacted because of this divergent concept of self. The first break she makes with the definitions governing her motherhood is her relationship toward her children while she is living at Sweet Home. Unlike the expectations dictating her relationship to her children within slavery, Sethe feels it her duty to remove her children from the limitations imposed upon them by

schoolteacher. Cornell West states "Toni Morrison's monumental novel holds a privileged place in black culture and modernity precisely because . . . black flight from white supremacy (a chamber of horrors for black people) may lead to the murder of those loved ones who are candidates for the 'dirtying' process. The black mother, Sethe, kills her daughter, Beloved, because she loved her so, 'to outhurt the hurter, ' ; as an act of resistance against the 'dirtying' process" (88). The *dirtying process* Sethe prevents her children from suffering is the abuse of schoolteacher and slavery. In order to prevent her children from enduring the dehumanization of slavery, from being weighed and measured, from being categorized by their human and animal features, Sethe attempts to run. For this she is severely physically punished.

To understand how grave a violation of slavery codes Sethe's act of motherhood is, the excessive nature of Sethe's punishment must be outlined. She is beaten brutally for participating in the plot to leave Sweet Home and for protecting her children. Her back is lashed open by the whips of schoolteacher and his nephews; however, her swollen belly, carrying Denver, is placed into a carved hole in the ground to protect the "unborn livestock." Schoolteacher's conceptualization of Sethe as simply a breeder conflicts enormously with her own concept of herself as a tender, loving, protective mother.

Schoolteacher's assessment of Sethe links to what Simone de Beauvoir contended: "that women's inferior status was rooted in man's conception of woman as Other. If woman is Other, then she is always available as the vehicle for the self-conception and activities of man, the subject, the topic" (Kittay 267). Sethe's otherness as a woman is compounded by her slave status which defines her as completely other, inhuman. Therefore it is the next form of torture that schoolteacher inflicts that confirms the irrevocable rift between these two ideologies, Sethe's view of motherhood and schoolteacher's cultural definition of her as breeder. His punishment of her propels Sethe to assert her autonomy by taking further steps of revolt.

Schoolteacher encourages his two nephews to nurse from Sethe. Her repeated refrain "They stole my milk" is the summation of the horror of her experience. Julia Kristeva suggests that "milk and tears became the privileged signs of the *Mater Doloros* who invaded the West beginning with the eleventh century" (311). Sethe also makes the connection between her milk, her tears, and her motherhood.

Through Schoolteacher's act, not only is Sethe's body invaded, but her life force, her mother's milk, saved for her young daughter is stolen. Her motherhood is corrupted. Not inconsequentially, Halle, who is hiding from the slave catchers in the loft above the scene of his wife's abuse, goes insane. The last report Paul D has is of Halle sitting

by a butter churn madly spreading the butter and clabber all over his face. Sethe, upon hearing this, links the butter to her stolen milk. Although she is sympathetic to his plight, she is at the same time infuriated that she is able to suffer such horror and survive, whereas he is unable to just watch it and remain sane. She says in horror, "He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air?" (Beloved 69). This huge condemnation of Halle's emotional weakness is based upon unrealistic images of male expectations, a point that Paul D quickly makes in Halle's defense.

The significance of the difference between Halle and Sethe's reactions to the horror is based upon Sethe's motherhood. Paulla Ebron and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing submit that Beloved "tells of the ambiguity of the maternal; it is violent and cruel as well as caring and accepting despite all costs" (403). Anne Goldman turns the focus to the restrictions of the maternal in Beloved by suggesting that "analyzing the ideology of motherhood as it is constructed by the dominant culture enables us to begin defining the locus of women's oppression across racial lines. Looking more closely at the institution of motherhood as the enslaved woman herself experiences it, however, may allow us to analyze how such an ideology is itself constructed not only across but by racial difference" (316). It is this racial difference that allows the white boys, who occupy the

power position, to abuse Sethe's black body that represents her 'otherness.' The stolen milk, and the outrage that her child would be deprived, is what spurs her to run from Sweet Home in her wrecked condition.

In fact, it is her motherhood that impels her to continue on after collapsing in the woods where she encounters Amy Denver. If it were not for the unborn, kicking Denver, and the thought of the child suffering inside her dead body, Sethe would have relinquished her life to avoid her physical pain. Therefore, in a cyclical fashion, it is her conception of motherhood, which causes her to transgress the limitations imposed upon her by slavery, that causes her to suffer so extraordinarily, yet she is able to withstand this torment because of her view of motherhood. Through this act Sethe attains what Carol Gilligan defines as the "second level [of moral development], called the conventional level, morality is identified with self-sacrifice--a stereotype of femininity" (549).

Later, to prevent her children from returning to Sweet Home, Sethe's view of motherlove is equally, in fact more so, defiant and she pays dearly for this effrontery. Her definition of protection enables her to attempt to slaughter her four children. I find it difficult to make a definitive moral judgement on this act--I can neither applaud Sethe's choice, nor condemn it--and am more often than not in

defense of Sethe's infanticide. This, however, is not generally the case. Elsie F. Mayer in her article "Morrison's Beloved" states, "Sethe's murder of her infant daughter, although motivated by the conviction that slavery is worse than death, is nonetheless reprehensible. Unrepentant, she chooses alienation from the Black community rather than admitting the heinousness of the murder and seeking forgiveness" (192-3). It is true that by transgressing legal, social, and ethical laws, Sethe is imprisoned, then shunned by her community, and ultimately emotionally then physically estranged from her children. Sethe transgresses both the dominant and African American codes of motherhood and is punished by both systems.

However, I do not think she is deserving of such reprisal. She loses the precious life of the child she kills; she suffers the detachment and then abandonment of her two sons, Howard and Buglar who run away fearing she will try to kill them again; she watches as her surviving daughter, Denver, goes deaf for eight years rather than hear her admit to infanticide. These are harsh realities. And Susan Babbitt reminds us that Sethe's "deciding to try to kill her children stands out in the novel, not as a decision to deprive her children of the minimal conditions for life accorded them under slavery, but rather as an attempt to claim for herself something of which, under slavery, she ought not even to have been able to dream" (Babbitt 7).

That claim is motherhood. Developing this thought, Lori Askeland remark that "Sethe's claim of love for herself and for her children makes her love 'too thick' according to Paul D" (796).

Mayer's earlier statement proposes that Sethe's lack of repentance is what causes Sethe pain. Although the townswomen deem Sethe transgressive and Sethe is ostracized by the community, it is not just Sethe's murderous act that causes the townsfolk to back away from her--Sethe's straight back and lack of tears as she is taken away in the jailer's cart contribute to their distance. Because she had "a profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once" (Beloved 152).

These women perform the role of judge and jury. As Foucault states "disciplinary mechanisms secreted a 'penalty of the norm', which is irreducible in its principles and functioning to the traditional penalty of law" (183). Sethe breaks these norms and the women punish Sethe for her transgression and become "the minor court that seems to sit permanently in the buildings of discipline, and which sometimes assumes the theatrical form of the great legal apparatus" (Discipline 183). By withholding their supportive song, the women become judge and jury. Or, as Dayle B. DeLancey remarks "what these people do object to is

what they perceive as the arrogance and foolhardiness of Sethe's attempt to take control of her life by giving her powerful motherlove free reign" (17). Similarly, Babbitt argues that "Sethe's commitments to love and autonomy do not make sense in terms of a dominant conceptual framework that classifies her as subhuman. But they do indeed make sense in terms of general human needs and expectations--in particular, dignity and self-respect" (6).

Mayer sees this differently, suggesting that "the consequence of Sethe's refusal to repent is denigration of herself and her daughter Denver" (193). In fact Mayer links Sethe's name to the Set of Egyptian theology and suggests Sethe is in line with "the Egyptian myth" in which Set "murders his brother Osiris out of jealousy, is banished to the desert, alienation and death" (192). Mayer also connects Sethe to Seth who "is born to Adam and Eve after Cain murders Abel, reviving hope of God's favor (Genesis 4:35)" (192). Although these connections based upon naming are interesting, they do not capture what is truly the novel's struggle. Sethe is neither a jealous murderer nor the redemptive symbol which Mayer suggests. Her struggle to define her motherhood is assuredly aberrant; however, I contend that Sethe strives for freedom and autonomy-- for herself and children--regardless of the ensuing reprisals. Sethe pursues what Anne Goldman thinks is "how to effect self-ownership, to put body and soul back together after her

circulation as commodity under the slave system" (313).

It is also important to recall that the women withhold their mourning, supportive songs, much in the way they withheld warning that a slave catcher was coming. This aspect of the town's attitude toward Sethe is linked to their view of Baby Suggs and is based upon extremely selfish and vindictive motivations. Consequently, their choice to distance themselves from Sethe is not the barometer with which to gage Sethe's righteousness.

The resentment generated against Suggs and what is perceived as an over abundance of love and good luck exemplified by the impromptu party--Suggs' transgressions--are passed onto Sethe: "Not Ella, not John, not anybody ran down or to Bluestone Road, to say some new whitefolks with the Look just rode in" (Beloved 157). Stamp Paid thinks "nobody warned them, and he'd always believed it wasn't the exhaustion from a long day's gorging that dulled them, but some other thing--like, well, like meanness--that let them stand aside" (Beloved 157). Because of this jealousy and other rifts, Sethe is forced to inhabit a space outside of the town literally and metaphorically. Isolated, she lives with her surviving daughter Denver and maintains minimal contact with the rest of the town.

In questioning the degree to which Sethe's act is transgressive, and judging the validity of the debate trying to label it either a right or wrong act, historic events may

help. Eugene Genovese notes that "slave abortions, much less infanticide, did not become a major problem for the slave holders or an ordinary form of 'resistance' for the slaves" (497); however, in the case of Margaret Garner, this runaway slave not only attempted to slaughter her children, but succeeded and was then tried for having stolen and destroyed property: her children. Trudier Harris states that Morrison "is not only reenacting the anguish of Margaret Garner, the slave woman upon whom Morrison loosely based her tale," but calls out to remind us of the pain suffered by these slaves/mothers (12). It should also be noted that this woman's story has twice influenced the consciousness of the reading public: now, in Morrison's novel, and also during the period of the actual events. Ashraf Rushdy recounts that "a year and a half after her trial, Garner had become a symbol for what Frederick Douglass called his 'philosophy of reform'" (573).

Again, in counter point to cold historic fact, Morrison places passionate details. Genovese explains that "some slave women took little interest in their children either because they succumbed to the terrific pressures of overwork, insufficient time for child care, and general demoralization or because they did not want to raise them as slaves" (496), and Morrison describes the few exchanges between Sethe and her own mother. We are presented with Sethe sitting waiting to catch just a glimpse of her

mother's hat, then later staring at the mark beneath her mother's breast and being slapped at the suggestion that Sethe too wanted a brand, Sethe listening to the fact that she was the only child that her mother did not throw away, because her mother had put her arms around her father-- indicating the other children had been conceived resistantly if not violently. Then much later, the small child Sethe searching the burnt body of a woman trying to decipher if it was in fact her mother. And what had this woman done to deserve such a fate? These images of motherhood and of mother and child relationships are placed in the novel to emphasize the love between slave mother and slave child, despite the limitations slavery imposed upon motherhood. These images compound the power and pain that Sethe specifically suffered, which motivates her choice to kill her children.

Much later, Sethe has the opportunity to mother the dead child her earlier version of motherhood deemed all right to kill. This time Sethe follows all of the structures of traditional motherhood. This time Sethe almost loses her life. When Beloved comes back and is fully recognized as the reincarnation of her daughter, Sethe's mothering takes a very bizarre form and she becomes something other than a routine mother. By conforming to all of the cultural edicts of motherhood, Sethe abdicates a concept of herself outside of this role and is literally

consumed by her daughter. For the reincarnated figure of Beloved, Sethe almost destroys herself to prove her love and her motherhood. She braids Beloved's hair, cooks her delicacies, spoils her with sweets, gives up her own clothes to adorn Beloved, and dotes on her as if Beloved were an infant.

In this section of the novel, Sethe transforms into a demented Martha Stewart. She follows all the mandates of good mothering. She pampers her daughter at the expense of her own health. She gives up her own food to feed Beloved. She cuts up her own clothes to clothe Beloved. She gives up Paul D to have Beloved. She gives up her job to tend to Beloved. It is Denver who breaks the circle she once guarded and nurtured. And, ultimately, it is the townswomen who exorcise the ghost/Beloved from Sethe's house.

The women gather together, singing their songs, thereby forcing Beloved out because they will not abide the ghost's trespassing. They will not allow the ghost to cross over into the corporal world.

This point is intriguing. The women see the haunting of 124 Bluestone Road as part and parcel of life. They do not, however, believe a ghost should come back in human form and cause problems: "As long as the ghost showed out from its ghostly place--shaking stuff, crying, smashing and such--Ella respected it. But if it took flesh and came in her world, well, the shoe was on the other foot. She didn't

mind a little communication between the two worlds, but this was an invasion" (Beloved 257). The townswomen recognize the ghost's transgression and deem it unfair to allow past to add to the misery of the present. Ella has her own ghosts, her own dead child which she believes should remain in the past and in the realm of the ghostly. Ella "didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. Sethe's crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy" (Beloved 256). Beloved has transgressed and is punished.

Again the women act as judge and jury, but this time their force is directed at Beloved, and her spirit is sent back to it ghostly realm. I believe this novel clearly outlines the need for women to transgress the restrictions of femininity outlined by the dominant culture--in Beloved, slavery rules--even though the reprisals for these acts are severe. I interpret the close of the novel in a positive light. I believe that just as Sethe claims her autonomy through her rupture of cultural codes behavior, Beloved also violates external limits. Both exhibit agency through their actions, even though the ultimate price they pay is extreme.

Section II: "Beauty and Blackness in Song of Solomon

Following the edicts of motherhood proscribed by an unrealistic social structure of the dominant American culture and also in African American culture leads to personal erasure, yet, a woman's rejection of these structures incurs societal wrath. Either way these women lose. Only if personal development and autonomy are valued and gained does transgression outweigh conformity. As in Beloved, these obstacles are also present in Song of Solomon, where two aspects of the codification of femininity converge: beauty and motherhood. There are two images of femininity criticized in Morrison's fiction: the first image is the supremely loving, giving mother, the second is the sexual beauty at the disposal of men. I analyze motherhood by discussing three woman: Ruth Dead, Pilate Dead, and Reba Dead. All of these woman develop their own definitions of motherhood, all are transgressive of social definition of motherhood. I shall also discuss Pilate's other attributes that make her multifaceted character extremely useful in discussing transgressive characters in relation to images of femininity.

In Ruth Foster Dead's fulfillment of the motherhood ideal, she is greatly lacking. The problematic situation in assessing Ruth is that very little the reader knows about her is told unbiasedly. Most of the information comes from the clues we have from her husband, which are scanty and

suspect. He discusses her sexuality as being abhorrent and tells of his suspicion of her incestuous relationship with her father and of her peculiar fascination with the graveyard. Theodore Mason indicates that "this excessive dependence on external signs of continuity and the combination of guidance and imprisonment are echoed in the overtones of Ruth's unnatural affection for both her father and her son" (507). Later, we have Milkman's retelling of his mother's perspectives of the very same instances and also her recounting his conception and birth. It is at this point the role that Pilate plays in aiding Ruth's seduction of Macon and the conception of Milkman come to light. It is also at this point that Milkman is informed of his father's active attempts to cause Ruth to miscarry.

As in several of the other women I shall be discussing, Ruth's motherhood is highly problematic. Joyce Pettis reports that Ruth Dead "has reared her daughters in correct, middle-class fashion and infused them with a sense of their innate superiority which alienates them from their community, and destines them to be lonely, unloved women as she is" (26). Ruth is not only ineffectual in guiding her daughters toward maturity but she is also highly suspect because of her "too long" breastfeeding of her son Macon, hence his nickname Milkman. The theme of mothers who neglect and/or abuse their children is consistent in Morrison's fiction.

Yet, the alternate modes of motherhood offered by Pilate and Reba are equally ineffectual at helping Hagar reach maturity with an intact sense of self. Pilate's own daughter is wild and it suits her; she is free and easy with men and this also suits her. When Reba does have trouble with one of her beaus, Pilate is quickly at her side to defend her daughter--at knife point if need be. However, when it comes to Hagar, both Pilate and Reba miscalculate that she could survive a life like their own. The complexity of Hagar's character is not completely accounted for by the problematic mothering she receives. Hagar also struggles with the burden of beauty and what she perceives to be a necessity to emulate cultural ideals.

Pilate is idiosyncratic because of her sexuality or lack thereof and her perception of the world, and her lack of a navel. However, unlike the other women with the possible exception of Sethe and Sula, her break from the restrictions of feminization lead to an ever expanding self-awareness, to her connection to the earth and to spirits of the dead.

Unfortunately, it is only Pilate who is able to gain wisdom from her past--she seems to be the only mother who is fully aware of the impact that her choices have made upon her daughter, Reba, and granddaughter, Hagar. And she is the only mother who has compensating positive influences that mitigate her breach of her mothering role. This,

however, does not relieve her of the reprisal executed against her, although her murder at the end of the novel takes on transcendent qualities. Valerie Smith notes that "it is Pilate who represents not only embodied history but the praxis that comes with recognizing history effects, the willingness to theorize about possibilities in the face of history, and the ability to make concrete alternatives to personal and public inequities" (Home 113). Amazingly, her dying words are "if I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more" which is quite a contrast to the defeated Baby Suggs in Beloved who wills herself to death. Pilate, as she dies in Milkman's arms, sees someone standing by and she smiles. Perhaps she sees her father. As a bird carries her earring away--the one carrying her name--she is linked to Singing Bird, her mother, and to her family of Flying Africans. Pilate's transgressions are clearly worth the penalty of death.

Beyond the necessity of motherhood, the second aspect of femaleness addressed in Morrison's work is the enforced image of beauty some of the women attempt to emulate. Here I believe Morrison not only criticizes the agenda forcing all woman to modify and self-mutilate in order to attain an impossible ideal, but I also believe she focuses particular attention on the struggles of black women trying to attain an ideal generated by a predominantly white society. The portrayal of Hagar is the main example of this problem, but

First Corinthians and Magdalene Dead also embody certain virtues which limit their personal freedom. Ultimately, the women who try to fulfill the images of femininity dictated to them are destroyed through erasure, and those rupturing the existing order are punished for their autonomy. In Song of Solomon, beauty as a feminine ideal is painfully, tragically, pursued by Hagar. As Michael Awkward states, because "Hagar's female status denies her entry as actor and subject to paradigmatic epic means of transcendence. Consequently, she is denied access to the transformative possibilities of a regenerative necessary distance from a corruptive mainstream American bourgeois value system" (148). He suggests that "because the mythic black narrative of communal transcendence is no longer extant . . . Hagar has no means of achieving a nurturing knowledge of self and culture that would make it possible for her to reject the debilitating tenets" of American culture (148). In simpler terms, Hagar fails to transgress the proscribed role of femininity espoused by the dominant culture and supported by her African American culture--but not her own mother and grandmother--that prizes white skin, straight hair, and light eyes.

Awkward states that "Hagar's journey to reification and, ultimately, physical death, has its source in her adoption of a patriarchal society's almost timeless figuration of woman as object, in her futile attempt to

achieve the bourgeois society's notions of female beauty (148). Differentiation between the two options, of adhering to or rejecting this impossible beauty ideal, comes only after assessing the gains made by those who transgress. Or, in Hagar's case, what lack of transgression of these beauty ideals leads her to do to herself. Hagar's demise is a vicious combination of romantic disappointment and culturally generated self-hatred. She mistakenly attributes Milkman's rejection to her lack of white characteristics. Morrison's description of Hagar madly striving to attain impossible physical characteristics is brutal. Brutal and brilliant. Morrison slams home the corrupting nature of the magazine photographs and the advertisement offering beauty, whiteness, and happiness, which Hagar clutches as she trips on her new pumps into the mud.

Susan Willis argues that "Hagar's hysteria and death mark the limits of her assimilation to bourgeois culture. Neither through withdrawal nor through commodity consumption can Hagar transform herself into an object. Her marginality, by reason of race and lumpen background, is the basis for her inalienable human dimension. As Morrison might have put it, she is simply too black, too passionate, too human ever to become reified" (267). bell hooks illuminates the "darker-skinned black females who internalize the assumption that dark is ugly and constantly assault themselves by inner negative feedback also cannot

fully self-actualize" (Sisters 93). Hagar, Pauline Breedlove and her daughter, Pecola, are unable to break from these restrictive aspects of cultural femininity. Not only are these women unable to self-actualize, their inability to rupture external beauty codes proffered by the dominant culture and supported by the African American culture leads Pauline to hyper-religiosity, Hagar to self-destruction, and Pecola to insanity.

In Song of Solomon Morrison also reflects upon the myth of women who destroy themselves out of love. On Milkman's trip South he hears the story of Rena's Gulch. The tale explains how Rena, Sugarman's wife, wept herself to death after her husband flew back to Africa without her. Rena's love is described as a hungry, all consuming love. Milkman thinks of Hagar and how Hagar's love for him drives her to repeatedly attack him. However, it is suggested the reason Rena wept and threw herself into the gulch was not so much for the loss of her loved one as the burden of being left behind with 21 children. Also implied is perhaps that Hagar's murderous love is more rage than lust.

Unlike Hagar, Macon's daughters, First Corinthians and Magdalene, embody the cultural codes of femininity defined as beauty and refinement. However, like Hagar they suffer because they do not break from the restrictions enforced by adherence to this definition. Theodore Mason states that "in the instances of both Ruth and Corinthians we discover

Morrison's recognition of the ease with which human lives can turn rigid under the pressures of everyday life. The discontinuity so characteristic of life can lead the psychologically unready or ill-equipped to a critical sort of stasis destructive of themselves and others" (571).

Magdalene and First Corinthians lead stagnant lives. They are consumed by the small business of life managing their mother's home and maintaining appearances to fulfill their parents' definition of proper feminine behavior. Even at forty they are unemployed, unmarried, unloved, and unfulfilled. With this in mind it becomes clear that the two Dead daughters are just that: Dead. Not only do they ascribe to their father's edicts defining proper female behavior, they believe them. As Cynthia Davis expresses it, "the problem with such internalization is not that it is ambitious, but that it is life-denying" (326). Because they are so conformist, they are completely erased most of their lives, and most of the novel. First Corinthians, out of sheer desperation, finally at the age of forty, breaks out of her restrictive environment.

By breaking the restrictions governing her behavior, First Corinthians gains autonomy. She attains a job as a servant, far beneath her status, which she lies about, claiming that she is a secretary to the local poet/dignitary: "Amanuensis. That was the word she chose, and since it was straight out of the nineteenth century, her

mother approved" (Song 187). Secondly she begins her first love affair, with a man also far beneath her status. No longer consumed by external codes dictating her life, First Corinthians chooses to override her enforced class consciousness. she rejects the poverty of her professional and emotional development and creates an independent life. Although her father attempts to break off her relationship with Porter, at Milkman's insistence, First Corinthians finally transgresses the rules of her life and gains autonomy and, perhaps, love.

Through these women, Morrison comments on the pressures of conformity to feminine standards and the necessity to break these rules in order to attain self-value. House states that First Corinthians "despises her celibacy. She becomes involved in a secret affair with Porter, a yard man she is ashamed to bring home to meet her financially ambitious, hence villainous father. When Porter threatens to leave her, she sprawls on the hood of his car and hangs on until he relents and brings her not to Heaven, but back to his tenement room for a night of lovemaking (229). Although the image of Porter is not a favorable one,--he is the man who, in a drunken stupor, urinated off the roof of one of Macon's tenements--and his home is a shack-like room, First Corinthian chooses to be with him as a way of claiming herself.

Magdalene, called Lena, vocalizes the oppressive

situation of the Dead women. In a verbal attack on her brother, Milkman. Although this moment is significant in Milkman's development, I am unsure if it is a point of catharsis for Lena. As House suggests, "Lena builds her adulthood around her loyalty to her mother who she fears will be physically abused by her father if she leaves home. Her reward is to sit alone in her room, make artificial red roses to sell to a department store on consignment, and contemplate her bitterness. Her reward is to watch the death of the maple sapling, a tree she has nurtured for years" (229). The benefits she yields from this one moment are less significant than her sister's, and her overall situation remains unchanged. Although she is aware that she maintains the system that oppresses her, and she is angry at her lifestyle, she does not rupture the framework. She only complains about her subjugation without actively correcting her circumstances.

In Song of Solomon, two choices are manifested by the female characters. They can choose to follow the edicts of motherhood and beauty and fulfill the requirements of femininity and thereby forgo personal liberty and risk complete erasure. Ruth Magdalene, and Hagar are strong persuasions to smash this code. In contrast to their compliance First Corinthians and Pilate choose the second alternative, transgression. Although First Corinthians' future is uncertain, and Pilate is murdered by Guitar, both

these women decide to define their own lives. Therefore, these two women consider the potential reprisals for their actions and deem autonomy worth the risk.

Section III: "The Lethal Ideals of Beauty and Motherhood
Presented in The Bluest Eye"

In The Bluest Eye, several instances of the feminine role assigned to women, and their wholehearted acceptance of it, create characters complicit in their own demise. The novel is Morrison's clearest description of the consequences of supporting the dominant American culture's ideals of femininity. The requirements for white beauty and ideal motherhood are replicated in the African American culture as well. The result of upholding the codification of women according to Hollywood images of beauty and domesticity leads to the complete failure of Pauline Breedlove and the ensuing insanity of her daughter, Pecola. bell hooks states that "women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo" (in Meyers 485). With this in mind, the primary focus of this chapter is the development of the psyche of adolescent black girls in a culture that values whiteness, and/or lightness. Pecola Breedlove--like Hagar--so desires to meet the standards set before her that she goes mad. Significant to this novel is the narrator, Claudia MacTeer, who vocalizes the pressures to conform to this ideal and the frustrations

and self-abuse caused by this adherence. Claudia's view also develops the "colorist" conflicts found within the black community which places lightness in a prized position. The character of Maureen Peale is introduced, as are other fair-skinned characters, and Maureen is described as abhorrent in her pampered status.

The second aspect of The Bluest Eye is the restrictions of women to the role of mother. In this novel, as in several other Morrison's novels, the mothers are impaired in their ability to perform the dictated role of caretaker. Although none are so oppressed as Sethe in Beloved, and therefore none need transgress as dramatically, Morrison's most unforgivable image of failed motherhood is Pauline (Polly) Breedlove, Pecola's mother. As Hazel Carby explains "the parameters of the ideological discourse of true womanhood were bound by a shared social understanding that external physical appearance reflected internal qualities of character and therefore provided an easily discernible indicator of the function of a female" (25). Because Pauline completely believes that beauty dictates one's value as a loveable women, when she fails to meet Hollywood standards of beauty, she also rejects her daughter because of Pecola does not fit into the dominant concept of beauty that Pauline has internalized. Pauline ascribes so tightly to the images of beauty depicted on the silver screen that she foreshadows her daughter's madness. Julia Kristeva asks

"what are the aspects of the feminine psyche for which that representation of motherhood [Mater Dolorosa] does not provide a solution or else provides one that is felt as too coercive by twentieth-century women?" (317). I suggest the aspect of beauty is one such aspect.

Pauline tries to emulate Jean Harlow. Pecola becomes Shirley Temple. Rosalie Murphy Baum concludes that "Pecola early realizes that blue-eyed white girls are beautiful and that their lives are beautiful; in this identification she is clearly her mother's child" (102). Because of their belief that beauty and whiteness will grant happiness, both Pauline and Pecola are unequipped to transgress the cultural codes of femininity and lose all possibility for autonomy.

Women who fail to meet the standards of feminine qualities of motherhood are severely punished for their insufficiency. Unlike the other novels, I find it difficult to locate any transcendent aspects in the women who fail. Instead, it seems the condemnation for failing to be a proper mother is rightfully heaped on the character of Pauline Breedlove. In this case, Pauline's transgression--like Ruth in Song of Solomon and Margaret in Tar Baby--is not protecting her child. She transgresses the natural order of things and not only pays for this rupture with her own happiness but also sacrifices her daughter's virginity and sanity. This is a bleak novel with very little development of self-directed characters striving for

autonomy. Only the figure of the narrator Claudia offers possibility for growth.

The codification of femininity as beautiful and white is explored in the 1970 novel, The Bluest Eye. As Lynne Tirrell argues, "Pecola is destroyed by the cultural values she adopts. Pecola has an impoverished sense of self and insufficient self-esteem because she accepts the values of the white community as (inadequately) filtered through the black community" (120). The characters and the narrator plainly state the dilemma of being a black girl/woman in a country that values whiteness as the key to beauty. Joyce Pettis suggests that "the narrative, in spite of its circular design, reveals Pauline's growing disappointments and her eventual evolvment into a woman who embraces the Western standard of beauty as the measure of her own and Pecola's worth" (27). By adhering to the institutionalized, socially supported dictates of beauty, the female characters erase themselves. They melt into tortured nothingness.

As demanded by the painful story of a young girl striving for acceptance, significant analysis is devoted to Pecola Breedlove and her doll. However, her mother, the progenitor, Polly Breedlove enriches my handling of femininity defined as beauty because for her the loss of her front tooth means loss of all that is beautiful and leads to her acquiescence to a life of squalor. For her, feminine power is beauty, and for her, beauty is embodied by the

movie stars; for her daughter, all is contained in Shirley Temple's blue eyes.

Pauline's story is one of complete abdication of self. She is a romantic. Yet as Edmund Napieralski affirms, Pauline "rejects facts of her life, first for the fantasy of the Dreamland Theater, and then for the *imitation of life* she lives with her white employers, the Fishers" (59) [Italics mine]. Using the phrase "imitation of life" has particular resonance in The Bluest Eye. At one point in the story, the light skinned Maureen calls attention to Pecola's name asking, "Wasn't that the name of the girl in *Imitation of Life*?" (Blue 67). More likely than not Pecola was named after the character, but endemic of Pauline's warped internalization of the celluloid world, she misspells the name, and ignores the "tragic" portion of the "tragic mulatto" tale. Here I believe Morrison is further developing the character of Pauline Breedlove who so loved the movies that she named her very black daughter after the *tragic mulatto* who "hates her mother cause she is black and ugly" (Blue 67). It is difficult to tell if Pauline's choice is wishful thinking or utter ignorance. Morrison places this movie's title in her novel to emphasize that the discourse of the black/ugly, white/pretty binary has been ongoing.

In fact, John Bishop reports that "since the novel is set seven years after the movie's 1934 release, the twelve-

year-old Pecola could not have been named for the girl in the film;" however, he goes on to contend that Maureen's accurate but incomplete summary of the film, based on Fannie Hurst's 1933 bestseller, illustrates her--and her community's--adoption of Hollywood's image of beauty: 'black' is 'ugly,' 'mulatto' is 'pretty,' and, by extension, Shirley Temple is prettier still" (252). Therefore, it seems that through this play on the Imitation of Life Morrison emphasis the African american replications of the dominant culture's definition of femininity as beautiful and whiter. This limiting definition of femininity must be broken in order for women to attain autonomy and self-worth.

Napieralski continues to investigate this dyad, explaining that the "plague that ravages the landscape and infects people in the world of the novel and generation after generation is racism. Racism denies truth, freedom, justice, and the opportunity to experience identity and dignity. The tragic victim is neither a king nor even one little girl but an entire people" (60). This comment emphasizes the extensive arena influenced by the culturally enforced definition of femininity that requires beauty exemplified by Pecola's individual subject position. Bishop goes on to say that "Maureen Peal's mistake has a larger relevance as well, for in Morrison's novels the act of (mis)naming signifies the community's power to deny individual autonomy and to use people for its own ends"

(254). Pecola's lack of identity is demonstrated in the Peola/Pecola division that reflects the black/white binary that defines her tragic life. Similarly Pauline acutely feels the impact of racism and classism on her weak sense of self. Her idealism and naivete are shredded away by her marriage to Cholly and their move to the more urban environment. Here she is exposed to harsher images of ideal femininity, embodied not only by the whites but also confirmed by the blacks in her new home--Lorain, Ohio.

Lorain, Ohio, is Toni Morrison's birth place. Morrison expressly states, in the Afterword, that The Bluest Eye is by no means a reflection of her own homelife. She does, however, indicate that the emotions she conveys were prompted by her schoolgirl friend's desire to have blue eyes instead of the brown ones that matched her black, black skin. What Morrison finds "implicit in her desire" is "racial self-loathing" (210).

Morrison queries "Who told her? Who made her feel that it was better to be a freak than what she was? Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale? The novel pecks away at the gaze that condemned her" (The Bluest Eye "Afterword," 210). Desiring to be the object of this Lacanian gaze, Pauline turns more and more to fantasy. Rather than confront the harsh realities of her racist, "colorist," class conscious, and sexist environment, Pauline retreats to the comfort of

motion pictures and dreams of being Jean Harlow. Eleanor Traylor explains the impact of the culturally enforced image of femininity offered by Hollywood, suggesting that "the people of this fable-world imbibe toxic ideas like Pauline Breedlove of The Bluest Eye swallowing whole the nineteen-twenties extravaganzas of movieland and hating herself, her husband, and her child by comparison" (142). bell hooks links this phenomena to the current situation in African American culture, arguing that "the dearth of affirming images of black femaleness in art, magazines, movies, and television reflects not only the racist white world's way of seeing us, but the way we see ourselves. It is not mystery to most black women that we have internalized racist/sexist notions of beauty that lead many of us to think we are ugly" (84). And Sara Ruddick explains that "maternal thought embodies inauthenticity by taking on the values of the dominant culture" (593). In this way, Pauline is overwhelmed by her inability to emulate incredibly unrealistic images of femininity according to the idealized versions of beauty and motherhood. She then abandons her real role as wife and mother, leaving her daughter alone and unprotected from the same harsh realities Pauline herself can not abide.

One particular instance that conflates both problems Pauline allows to control her life is a brief yet pivotal scene in the novel. Pecola, with the narrator, Claudia

MacTeer, comes to the back door of the kitchen where her mother is a cook and caregiver to a little white girl. In the confusion, perhaps horror, at having her fantasy world of the Fisher's household and her real world of her own home collide, Pauline overreacts when Pecola topples a pie. Pecola's presence reminds Pauline that she is not, in fact, the woman of the house, and that the child she tends is, in her own estimation, far superior to her own child at the door. When the pie falls, and the contents both splatter and frighten the two girls, Pauline instantly moves to her charge to console and clean her. Pecola is first ignored and then rushed from the house. This scene conveys Pauline's shaky sense of self and her connection to fantasy as well as exposes her limited affinity to mothering Pecola.

Discussing this same scene, Elizabeth House connects "allegiance to the white family and rejection of her own" to the "disintegration of Pauline's natural self" (185). Due to her desire to fulfil the image of ideal motherhood that Pauline upholds, she places her allegiance with the young fisher girl who is well groomed, blond, and white. Pauline "has exchanged the feeling of being loved by and nourishing her family for that of being the Fisher's well-liked cook. Pauline does win a competition, that of being the best servant her employer can imagine. This victory, however, is one which negates her own life and family" (185). Neglecting her own children to fulfill her domestic

fantasies at the Fisher's house, Pauline, as Rosalie Murphy Baum argues, "turns to religion and the white world as her escape from the ugliness--spiritual and physical--of her own home and family. She identifies with the virtues of the white family for whom she works--the cleanliness, order, wealth and beauty--and becomes the agent of the Lord in punishing the ugly people in her own family for their failures" (100). Hating the very things she represses in her person, she condemns those who are poor, unkept, non-white, or unbeautiful according to the standards she has imbibed. She also lords her new found superiority over the people who undervalued her before Pauline obtained her work position. This empowered position is dependent upon the Fishers' white power and is reminiscent of the position of the slaves on Sweet Home. "As the Fishers' agent, Pauline haughtily rejects tradesmen's meat and produce which she would have meekly accepted for her own family. She reigns over bountiful cupboards and beautiful, clean linens. As a maid, Pauline does such a good job that the Fishers praise her [as the] 'the ideal servant (99)'" (House 185). Pecola and Pauline Breedlove are painful examples of women who believe in the system and destroy themselves because of their perceived lack of beauty.

Pettis maintains that "Morrison shows an extreme case of the effect of an incompetent mother on her daughter, but she equally demonstrates the victimization of the woman who

became the mother. Pecola's retreat into the safety of blue eyes and madness at the age eleven unsettles us, and noncompassionate readers will understand that Pauline's responses to her daughter are the responses of a woman also victimized" (29). Now, I have no doubt that the character of Pauline is constructed in a way that will grant her a certain amount of understanding, even sympathy. In fact, I believe most of Morrison's characters, even Cholly, Macon, and Valerian, have softening, contextualizing reasons--excuses--for their behavior. However, despite the sympathy these characters generate, they remain condemnable. Pauline fails according to the structure I have developed, and she fails according to many critics' readings of her. Davis believes that "the adoption of a rigid role, the withdrawal from life, is for Morrison as for Sartre a failure; but her condemnation is tempered by the recognition of the unnatural position of blacks in a racist society" (327). Morrison's development of this character is instructive. The readers are clearly being warned to reject the dominant culture's definition of femininity and also the replication of these ideals in the African American culture.

In an interview with Anne Kownen, Morrison states "my mode of writing is sublimely didactic in the sense that I can only warn by taking something away" (74). I believe this is exactly what is going on here, Morrison is warning by negative example: make your own life, or as Guitar says

to Milkman "it's your life, man. Live it", or suffer the consequences. Linda Dittmar underscores Morrison's didacticism. Dittmar states that "though Morrison sees her formal resistance to closure as a uniquely black aesthetic mode akin to black music (McKay 1983), and though she uses it as an opportunity to free readers to tap new capabilities within themselves (eg. compassion for Cholly, Tate), the question also arises whether some of this deflection may not have something to do with the fact that Morrison is a black woman writer whose 'implied reader,' to borrow Wolfgang Iser's term, is educated, middle class and not infrequently white."

The reason I stress Dittmar's thinking is that she echoes my own interest in reader response criticism. Although I do not delve into this area in this body of work, I do believe that Morrison is aiming at the aforementioned 'implied reader' in order to educate. Hence, just as I think Morrison uses Sula to educate the reader, I believe she uses Pauline and Pecola to warn the reader. The readers are warned not to replicates Pauline's errors and her "willing submissiveness to the seductive allure of the movies, where the act of embracing white standards of beauty results in blindness to and rejection of Black beauty" (28). Pauline's inability to rupture the restrictions placed upon her by the dominant codes of beauty is counterbalanced by Mrs. MacTeer.

Mrs. MacTeer is a positive example of motherhood. Although like Sethe and Baby Suggs, she is limited in her power to care for her children because of several constraints. Echoing Eva and then Hannah Peace, in Sula, Mrs. MacTeer's struggle to care for her girls is not a job she would volunteer to do again. The sense that motherhood is not all it is cracked up to be comes through clearly. Nevertheless, the care and protection Mrs. MacTeer provides keeps her children out of harm's way. And, although she can not prevent the outside world from influencing her children's sense of self, she does instill in them enough self-respect to prevent the annihilation suffered by Pecola. Unlike Pauline, Mrs. MacTeer does not actively support the status quo, placing whiteness above blackness. Not only does Pauline fully support the beauty portion of the definition of femininity she also supports the over-arching theme of black motherhood in relation to white children.

Now this twist is an extremely painful one. Unlike Sethe who demands her motherhood role in the slavery system which not only forbids it but denies its possibility, Pauline abdicates her in favor of the Fisher girl. She is guilty of the crime of which Son, in Tar Baby, accuses Jadine: "Feed, love and care for white people's children. That's what you were born for; that's what you have waited for all your life . . . Fat or skinny, head rag or wig, cook or model, you take care of white folks babies--that's what

you do and when you don't have any white man's baby to take care of you make one-out of the babies black men give you" (Tar 270). With this diatribe in mind, Pauline's treatment of the Fisher child, and her mistreatment of her own child, becomes even more problematic because Son suggests behavior like Pauline's is not unique.

A second significant difference between these two families is exemplified in the treatment the MacTeer girls receive when Freida receives an unwanted sexual advance and the way that Pecola's is handled. Claudia asks the crying Frieda what Mr. Henry had done:

"He . . . picked at me."

"Picked at you? You mean like Soaphead Church?"

"Sort of."

"He showed his privates at you?"

"Noooo. He touched me."

"Where?"

"Here and here." She pointed to the tiny breasts that, like two fallen acorns, scattered a few faded rose leaves on her dress. (Blue 99)

Emblematic in this scene is that the idea of being touched is not horrific to the girls; they can talk about it with familiarity. Soaphead Church had done it, and the idea of being flashed is also possible. Patricia Ticineto Clough states that "Claudia's survival is seemingly supported by the good enough care of her mother and father" (Blue 119).

More than this, the extremely important difference for the MacTeer girls is that their father is set to kill Mr. Henry except the tenant has had the good sense to run.

Unfortunately for Pecola, her father's protection from unwanted sexual attention is inverted. He rapes his child in order to love and protect, or so his drunken logic runs. Seeing his young daughter scrubbing dishes he wonders, "Why did she have to look so whipped? she was a child--unburdened--why wasn't she happy? The clear statement of her misery was an accusation. He wanted to break her neck--but tenderly" (161). Then in his haze, he chooses "to fuck her--tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold" (Blue 163). In his mutated passion, he finds it impossible to treat his child with any kindness, and even as he rapes her he ignores her pain:

The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made--a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon. (Blue 163)

The contrast in fathers--between Mr. MacTeer and Cholly Breedlove--is astounding.

The contrast in mothers also astounds. Not only does Pauline abandon her mother role of loving and protecting her children, but she instills in her daughter the deep belief

in white superior beauty. In studying Morrison's discourse on the problematic situation of black women in America, the equally problematic situation for black men is stresses. "However multiply split we perceive the subject to be, or deeply felt our sense of 'maleness and 'femaleness' as social constructions, however heightened our sense of historical consequences and current dangers of black afrocentrism" Blount suggests the project of black male feminists includes self-reflexivity (11). With that in mind, the development of the female characters in The Bluest Eye or in Sula, incorporate similar systems of role restriction limiting male characters. The problematic situation for Pauline Breedlove reflects and, and some ways depends, upon the limitation of Cholly's limited social situation. Rosalie Murphy Baum notes that "as Morrison, explains, Mrs. Breedlove 'needs Cholly's sins desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her tasks became' (p. 38). Thus, in this couple's complex interaction, it is the spouse--whose behavior is societally and subculturally approved--who is the chief aggressor" (101). Pauline's role reflects the dominant culture's as well as the African American culture's image of femininity.

Linked to Polly's own valuation of whiteness over blackness is the community's participation in self-discriminated practices of racism. bell hooks suggests that

"the indifference of white people who are not oppressed yet see themselves as politically correct, who witness the pain of the oppressed, who sympathize and then ignore, is mirrored in the lighter-skinned brown people who are almost white" (Yearning 159). This is precisely the problem for the Breedloves, which connects to Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, the Frears/Kureishi film; hooks goes on to say that this type of cultural replication "is the deep satirical message of the film, when it comes across as satire, it's social critique" (Yearning 159). This critique is represented by the ingestion of white cultural values by "lighter-skinned brown people" and is what we find in the problematic figure of Maureen Peale.

The figure of Maureen Peale, who is the closest possessor of the traits of whiteness, like Jadine, is described by Claudia as someone whose presence effects the darker-skinned people around her. Denise Hienze states that "Morrison's bout with colorism seems a necessary purgative in her attack on ideal standards of beauty, which in her experience, it appears, have been most abused by light-skinned blacks. Morrison spares no feelings; she feels no compunction, to mitigate her belief that the valorization of light-skinned beauty is the most disturbing and prevalent form of colorism and thus functions as one of the greatest barriers to the spiritual and psychic health of the black community" (Heinze 21). This is why Maureen Peale inspires

adoration in some people and in others hatred, but either way she enjoys her notable status: "I am cute! and you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute! (Blue 73). She makes life miserable for the other girls and her cruelty latches onto the one least able to endure it: Pecola. In hooks' work, she notes "black people were using the same harsh and brutal methods against one another that had been used by white slave owners against them when they were enslaved" (Sisters, 133).

Because of this support of beauty codes, beauty in this case being fairness, characters like Pauline replicate the dominate culture's bias. Unprotected by her mother and raped by her father, Pecola believes that it is her lack of blue eyes that has brought such hardship upon her. She has so fully ingested the movie world of her mother that she is utterly unable to conceive of herself outside of this structure. Her adherence to the system dictating the qualifications of beauty is complete.

Unfortunately, the black community does nothing to improve Pecola's self-image; in fact, steeped in the same judgments of beauty which Pauline imbibed at the movies, Pecola's neighbors think the baby parented by two ugly Breedloves should die. To these observers, lack of physical beauty equals lack of power to engender love, lack of competitive success, lack, even, of the right to

live. As neighborhood gossips say of Pecola's baby, 'She be lucky if it don't live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking' (p. 149). (House 186)

Not only is she unable to transgress the rules, she is unaware there is anything but the rules.

In contrast, Claudia and her sister Frieda are irritated by the racist environment in which they live. Claudia vocalizes a desire for change. She, perhaps, could develop into a character like Sula, whose transgression of externally imposed codes is enacted with abandon. Therefore House believes "Morrison's first novel is in part optimistic, though, for the dream of human fellowship, the goal of being true to oneself and recognizing the value of non-competitive human relationships, exists for two of its characters": Claudia and Frieda (187).

For me, however, the utter lack of transgression of the ideal of beauty, embodied by blue eyes and moviestars, leaves the women ruined and unable to attain a sense of self-importance or autonomy. And, quite significantly, although they obey the rules they do not escape reprisal. The worst example of this is Pecola's madness--even after attaining her fantasy of blue eyes, she worries: "Even if my eyes are bluer than Joann's and bluer than Michelena's and bluer than that lady's you saw, suppose there is somebody way off somewhere with bluer eyes than mine? . . . He should have made them bluer" (Blue 160). Trudier Harris defines

the link between self-acceptance and transgression:

"Neglected by her mother, scorned by her peers and teachers, raped and impregnated by her father, Pecola believes desperately that blue eyes will save her. Her journey from self-rejection to ultimate insanity in The Bluest Eye charts the course of the individual who finds herself outside community norms, basically outside community caring" ("Solo" 11).

This is also felt by Claudia who knows that Maureen Peale, because of her light skin and "good" hair, is a class favorite. This blending of white physical features and better economic conditions pervades Morrison's novels. To become independent of social pressure to conform, rebellion against these limitations is required. However, this transgression must be motivated by personal growth and a desire for a positive move forward into self-awareness. That is why Pauline's transgression of her mother role is a condemnation rather than an honor. Similarly, Cholly's rupture of his father role is motivated by unhappiness and personal failure. Hence, he is twice condemned, first by the community, then by himself. As Heinze states Morrison's "first novel epitomizes a community of all shades that has swallowed whole a convoluted notion of beauty and worth and then spit it out at each other and their children. The controlling metaphor for this state of affairs is in the title, the bluest eye--the transparent eyeball gone mad--

that becomes a synecdoche for western beauty, for scopophilia and objectification, appropriation and commodification, acquiescence and insanity" (25). Or as bell hooks suggests "woman of color must confront our absorption of white supremacist beliefs, 'internalized racism,' which may lead us to feel self-hate, to vent anger and rage at injustice at one another rather than at oppressive forces, to hurt and abuse one another" (in Meyer 493).

Even more than the novel Beloved, I find The Bluest Eye is "not a story to be passed on" (Beloved 275) unless it is used as a negative example. The novel does confirm the need to break the standards codes of beauty and motherhood in order to circumvent complete abdication of self.

Section IV: "Perfection and Purity in Sula"

In the 1973 novel Sula several women grapple with the codification of femininity according to the dominant American culture's ideal. Patricia Hill Collins notes that "there is a female model for moral development whereby women are more inclined to link morality to responsibility, relationships, and the ability to maintain social ties. If this is the case, then African-American women again experience a convergence of values from Afrocentric and female institutions" (219). As a reflection of this, in Sula the issue of female beauty has less emphasis and community approval of the character's motherhood and domestic life take on greater significance as definition of the proper female role. Significantly, there is a shift away from a struggle for whiteness.

The codes of the dominant culture that are replicated in the segregated community of the Bottom focus upon femininity as propriety and motherhood. Several women in this novel transgress or adhere, in varying degrees, to these models of femininity, and thereby offer both positive and negative support to my overall theory. The characters who choose to transgress the external limitations dictating femininity develop autonomous selves whereas those who succumb to the power of the dominate system are squashed under the pressures to conform.

Elizabeth House illuminates that "Morrison follows

events in the black community from 1919 to 1965, first detailing negative effects on those who venture beyond the Bottom, and finally, describing urban society's destruction of the black community" (188). Reflective of these changes in cultural ideals and the time period of its setting, in Sula the struggle to fulfill the definition of femininity is played out against the backdrop of etiquette and sexual morality. Eleanor Traylor suggest that "the people who inhabit the world created in The Bluest Eye (1970), Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977), and Tar Baby (1981) represent the ideas that daily bombard them, for these are solidly twentieth-century people" (142). Hence, as such representatives, the women in Sula grapple with issues surrounding definitions of women as both nurturant mothers and as economic providers.

In this novel, the representations of motherhood are manifold. Evelyn Nakano Glenn explains that "perhaps because the gendered allocation of mothering appears to flow inevitably from the division based on reproductive function, mothering--more than any other aspect of gender has been subject to essentialist interpretation; seen as natural, universal, and unchanging" (3). Consequently, when the idealized version of motherhood offered by the dominant culture (the white middle class) is ruptured, the transgressive women in Morrison's fiction are deemed weak, false, or evil.

The dichotomy that I wish to set up to analyze Sula is between the Peace women and the Wright women. The two Peace women, Eva and Hannah--grandmother and mother of Sula--break the rules of motherhood embodied in Helen (Helléne) Wright, Nel's mother. With the choice of these names Morrison continues her word play. Eva Peace is reminiscent of Eden, and her home is for some an oasis. However, with Hannah Peace, there might also be the connotation of "piece of ass." Perhaps Sula Peace is the third piece in the trilogy of women, or the missing piece from Nel's life. Also significant is Helen Wright's name. She is right, as in straight and conservative. And her daughter Nel Wright believes, until the close of the novel, that she is right, correct, in her view of Sula and right, honorable, in her choice of life. The opposing styles of motherhood which these women offer are interesting when they are measured against the images of motherhood demanded by the culture. Both Eva and Hannah are transgressive of the system dictating their behavior as mothers, both pay dearly for their rupture of this system.

Eva mothering style is bizarre, and frightening, much in the way of Sethe in Beloved. Eva's story stems back to the time when she is abandoned by her husband in the dead of winter, with three sick and starving children. Her husband BoyBoy "did whatever he could that he liked, and he liked womanizing best, drinking second, and abusing Eva third"

(32), so when "he left in November, Eva had \$1.65, five eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel. The children needed her; she needed money" (32). Her youngest child "Ralph, whom she called Plum" suffered severely from the deprivation and the cold. His shrieks of pain from caused by his inability to pass his stool clarified for Eva the urgency of her situation. She ran to the "outhouse with him. Deep in its darkness and freezing stench she squatted down, turned the baby over her knees, exposed his buttocks and shoved the last bit of food she had in the world (besides three beets) up his ass" and relieved his life-threatening constipation. Like Sethe she decided the situation was unbearable and cried "Nooo" (Sula 34).

In order to provide for them, Eva sacrifices her leg-- the reader is never sure exactly what happens to the leg or why she is able to collect insurance money that supports her family. All that is explained is that two days after Plum's crisis Eva "left all of her children with Mrs. Suggs, saying she would be back the next day. Eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg" (Sula 34). The most reasonable conclusion implies that Eva allowed a train to run over her leg and sued. In any case, Eva's view of motherlove is to provide the essentials for her children in any way she can. So, when Plum returns from the war addicted to drugs and slowly dying in the downstairs bedroom, Eva believes

motherhood includes dousing him with kerosene and setting him on fire.

It was "Hannah who found the bent spoon black from steady cooking" but it was Eva who "rolled a bit of newspaper into a tight stick about six inches long, lit it and threw it onto the bed where the kerosene-soaked Plum lay snug in delight" (Sula 47). She did this after going to his room one night and cradling him in his sleep. She could not bear the evidence she found when she "reached for the glass of strawberry crush. She put it to her lips and discovered it was blood-tainted water" (Sula 47).

Years later, Hannah asks Eva "Mamma, did you ever love us?" (Sula 67), and she queries "But what about Plum? What'd you kill Plum for, Mamma?" (Sula 70). To the first question, after her "hand moved snail-like down her thigh toward her stump" (67), Eva explains the difference of loving in 1923--the year of Hannah's question when she wonders if her mother "played with" her when she was little--and 1895, when "wasn't nobody playin' . . . Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies" (Sula 68). To the second question, Eva's response is more careful, and more reflective of her need for autonomy.

Eva explains the limits and requirements of motherhood as she sees it, in contrast to the external edicts of both American and African American culture. She explains that although she loved Plum, she could not let him be an infant

dependent upon her again. Her speech is reminiscent of Sethe's conversation with Paul D, when she circles the topic and doubles upon it: "When Eva spoke at last it was with two voices. Like two people were talking at the same time, saying the same thing, one a fraction of a second behind the other" (Sula 71). When Hannah asks Eva about her reasons for burning Plum, Eva explains she believed Plum was regressing. She knew he was trying to get back into her womb, that one night she would be sleeping and Plumb would literally try to crawl back into watery safety: "he was crawlin' back. Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time. I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb" (Sula 71). Eva can not allow this to happen to her, and she can not allow Plum to return to this infantile state.

Marianne Hirsh clarifies the situation by highlighting that "in trying to explain an act that is so obviously beyond comprehension, Eva dwells on an intense need for self-protection, a clear drawing of her own boundaries, a definitive expression of the limits of what she has to give, and she insists as well on Plum's boundaries, which, as a mother, she was forced to violate" (420). Eva may be seen as fulfilling what Carol Gilligan calls "the second Transition: From Goodness to Truth" whereby Eva begins "the reconsideration of the relationship between self and other,

as the woman starts to scrutinize the logic of self-sacrifice in the service of a morality of care" (565). Gilligan explains that "in separating the voice of the self from those of others, the woman asks if it is possible to be responsible to herself as well as to others and thus to reconcile the disparity between hurt and care" (565). Eve believes that "I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn't and I had to keep him out [of her womb] so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all crunched up inside my womb, but like a man" (Sula 72). Her view of motherhood and an autonomous self enabled her to rupture external codes of motherhood. As Julia Kristeva suggests "there is something in the Maternal notion that ignores what a woman might say or want" (304), but Eva rejects this codified maternal notion.

I believe Eva's choice to burn Plum to death is less justified than Sethe's decapitation of Beloved, yet much more justified than Pauline's neglect of Pecola. The problem with Eva's choice is that her motivation is tainted by her own sense of survival whereas Sethe is purely focused upon her children's well-being. Both of these women perform an act of infanticide. As difficult and painful as it is to live without their children, these women feel their acts are justified.

In contrast to Eva, Hannah's idea of mothering is more

untroubled. She sees mothering as playing with children as well as feeding and clothing them. In this conversation between Hannah and Eva, they discuss demonstrations of love. For Eva motherlove is the willingness to sacrifice her leg for her children and to kill them to prevent suffering and demise. For Hannah, motherlove is paying attention to children in a way that Eva could not. bell hooks says "it seems appropriate that this dialogue on love in Sula takes place between two black women, between mother and daughter, for their interchange symbolizes a legacy that will be passed on through the generations" (Sisters, 135). The legacy that is passed on is the disgruntled feelings that the daughters have for the mothers. Although Hannah thanks her mother for the food she provided, she is unhappy that her mother did not have some time to attend to less urgent matters. Ironically, and sadly, although Hannah seems to provide these other things for her daughter Sula, she does not have strong feelings of affection for her child. She states that "I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" (Sula 57), a condemnation Sula overhears. The inter-generational problematic stops here--Sula does not produce children. Unfortunately, neither Hannah nor Eva lives long enough or fully enough to reap whatever benefits there may have been in their transgressive acts. Hannah burns to death, and Eva is put into a nursing home far earlier than is required--if it is required at all.

Hearing Hannah's denunciation is perhaps the defining moment of Sula's life; she becomes motherless. Although Grant believes that "too often Hannah's comment is interpreted as a 'determining' factor in Sula's personality formation, as if this one remark betokened a socio-behavioral pattern and 'key'--that is, maternal neglect or insensitivity," he comments that "the narrator does not deny that Hannah's comment does affect Sula, but the effect is to clarify an independence--to teach 'her that there was no other that you could count on' (118-19)" (97). In this motherless state, Sula feels the vacuum in her life and finds a place she can fill without her mother's influence. A place that she must fill.

Or as Grant proposes, "when the young Sula, in Nel's presence, accidentally kills Chicken Little by throwing him into the river where he drowns, the ensuing loss of innocence is signified by both girls' profound cognizance of space-as-emptiness, a specific and almost mystical awareness of vacuity" (96). This lack of parental involvement does not simply grant Sula freedom; she is set adrift like Pecola and/or Jadine.

Foucault speaks of this type of void stating "in that zone which our culture affords for our gestures and speech, transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through

which it becomes all the more scintillating" (Discipline 32). It is in this void that the fearfulness that is always evident in Sula's personality changes to wildness. Lacking parental limitations, Sula searches for new boundaries to cross. Foucault states that

transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses. The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration and thus is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable. (Discipline 34)

This definition of transgression is most aptly utilized in this section because the lines crossed by Sula necessitate the development of new lines of distinction to continually separate her from her community and the standards of femininity the townspeople wish to reenforce.

Significantly, Sula, the product of this mother, Hannah, and grandmother, Eva, is instrumental in the downfall of these two mother figures. When Hannah catches fire while lighting the outside stove, Sula idly watches her

burn. Eva "had seen Sula standing on the back porch just looking . . . and remained convinced that Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested" (Sula 78). The fact that Hannah burns to death and Eve, in an attempt to save her burning daughter, jumps from the second floor window and shatters her already battered body, calls up the earlier burning of Plum. The irony is not lost on Eva who "muses over the perfection of the judgement against her" (Sula 78). The loss of this child as well as Sula's cold-hearted response to the burning of her mother echoes Eva's own callousness, although Eva does not vocalize regret.

Sula's development as an autonomous self has bloody and horrific origins and questionable results. There are basically five acts of transgressive behavior that define Sula: 1) She accidentally drowns Chicken Little, and enters Shadrack's cabin 2) She watches Hannah burn 3) She leaves the Bottom 4) She places Eva in a Nursing Home 5) She sleeps with her best friend Nel's husband.

Reviewing the first event, Sula and Nel are playing in the woods when Chicken Little arrives in his usual unkept state. Although the girls are harassing him, teasing him about picking his nose and being fearful of climbing the high tree limbs, they do not intend to kill him. Sula simply "picked him up by his hands and swung him outward then around and around. His knickers ballooned and his

shrieks of frightened joy startled the birds and the fat grasshoppers. When he slipped from her hands and sailed away over the water they could still hear his bubbly laughter" (Sula 60-1). It is important to remember that "they expected him to come back up, laughing" (Sula 61) but he does not. Although the horror of the event is shocking, and the guilt for his death must have devastated both Sula and Nel, what I find most problematic is that neither girl tells anyone. This is Sula's first transgression, although I do not believe that it grants her autonomy.

It is at this point that Sula changes. She shifts from a anxious girl to a courageous one. Her conversion is extreme, almost as if the earlier state is so unbearable that she must invert herself. Sula's earlier fearfulness is explained by Nel, who realizes that Sula's ability to cut the tip of her finger off--in order to warn their tormentors of what she could do to them--is motivated by terror rather than bravery. Sula later develops a positive sense of self, although like Paul D in Beloved, several events in one single day converge and propel her forward. Marianne Hirsh offers an interesting interpretation of the drowning scene. She reads "Chicken's death--he quietly slips into the river and the girls don't try to save him--as a signal of Sula's and Nel's rebellious, if as yet unconscious, refusal of adult heterosexuality and motherhood as they perceive it" (423). Perhaps, like Eva, they must kill their pseudo-

child.

As intriguing as this concept may be, I suggest that the death of Chicken Little is a contributing factor to Sula's development of an outlaw mentality, rather than its illustration. Cynthia Edelberg's reading of the character of Sula is quite harsh. In fact she mis-reads Sula's reaction to the death of Chicken Little, declaring that "the incident ends in Chicken Little's funeral. Sula attends, but does not feel remorse . . . Sula's only concern is with the recluse Shadrach . . . What has he seen? Can he be persuaded not to tell?" (225).

My reading of the scene is substantially different. Sula feels dreadful about the death of Chicken Little, which was accidental, rather than the maliciousness implied by Edelberg. It is Nel who does not weep; Sula herself is destroyed. In reference to the funeral, Morrison writes "Sula simply cried. Soundlessly and with no heaving and gasping for breath, she let the tears roll into her mouth and slide down her chin to dot the front of her dress" (Sula 64).

Yet, despite Sula's shame and sadness, and Nel's stony silence, neither girl discloses their involvement in Chicken Little's death--even though it takes three days for his body to be discovered. I think this secret begins to rot both girls precisely when they choose to hide the accidental murder. Sula's response is to go wild--an option made

probable by her home environment--and Nel chooses to return to the safety of her mother's overly codified life style. Both choices are escapes.

Both girls retreat to the structures offered them by their families and replicate the representations of womanhood offered by their mothers. Unfortunately, Nel's alternative is a restricted, completely controlled femininity that supports the dominant culture's definition of womanhood. In contrast to Sula's haphazard upbringing, the Wright family is rigid at least as far as Helen and Nel go. Where Sula's life is chaotic and free wheeling, manless yet full of sex, Nel's world is rigid, controlled, and asexual. Edelberg states that "Sula, a product of this family wherein chaos reigns, goes at life with freedom and funkiness as the words were defined in The Bluest Eye" (224). Whereas Helen Wright is the daughter of a Louisiana prostitute and she and her grandmother conspire to eradicate any wanton nature from Helen herself--and, by extension, from Nel. Helen is a pinched and prudish woman as a result. She stands for all that is right and decorous. Her daughter Nel, ultimately, follows suit. Neither Nel nor Helen attain the what Kohlberg defines as the sixth stages of moral judgement, and they lose the capacity for moral judgements free "from the individual needs and social conventions" and "universal in application" (qtd in Gilligan 551). Because of their conformity to the external standards controlling

feminine behavior, these two woman remain trapped in their small view of the world.

They do not gain personal autonomy or fulfillment. Hirsh believes that Sula and Nel's "development and their friendship, and the text itself, revolve around their relationships to the powerful maternal figures who come to represent a female past, and around their attitude to maternity itself" (418). Hirsh goes on to say that "although the novel is clearly not written from the perspective of the mother, its generational structure allows it to serve as an emblem for the relation of an emerging feminism (new generation of women) to the maternal (oral tradition of the past)" (418). Therefore, the independence of Eva and Hannah is replicated by Sula, as is the prudishness of Helen repeated in Nel.

The day that Nel locks herself into a traditional pattern of femininity, marriage and predictable motherhood, Sula claims her autonomous self by vanishing from her town. Having left The Bottoms for many years, when Sula returns she almost immediately places Eva into an old folks' home. Eva suggested that Sula needed a husband and children to calm her down and straightaway has her removed from their house. This act coupled with other violations of community expectation confirms Sula as a transgressive figure for the people of the Bottom.

Sula "was pariah, then, and knew it. Knew that they

despised her and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men. Which was true. She went to bed with men as frequently as she could," (Sula 122) but Sula also knows that she is a scapegoat for the town's vitriol. "Their conviction of Sula's evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had leave to protect and love one another. 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" (Sula 102). Citing this same passage, Cynthia Davis suggests that it becomes clear that "Sula's neighbors fear and condemn her refusals to fit a conventional role, but her shapelessness gives them support" (331). Citing this same passage, Davis asserts that "displacing their fear and anger onto Sula, as onto Pecola, they can define themselves as 'better.' Sula, unlike Pecola, can bear that role, having chosen to be 'outside;' it is then tempting to argue that this kind of hero is 'a catalyst for good' in the society" (331). In some ways Sula is a positive influence; however, that is not her intention--she is strictly self-motivated.

For Sula, exploration of the world outside the Bottom leads her back to the Bottom when she feels she is done. Robert Grant, citing the novel, states that "Sula--who has 'no self,' 'no center,' and 'no ego' (119)--inchoately

understands and responds to the process by which iconoclastic individuals and preservative communities define and 'identify' themselves against each other. Thus she fashions and sustains her unique identity as a 'rebel' only, and necessarily, in connection with the fairly orthodox and enclosed community of the Bottom" (99). The African American community in the Bottom, like the people of Pauline Breedlove's Lorrain, Ohio, adhere to the proscribed definitions of femininity established by the dominant American culture. Against this structure, Sula is seen as a rebel, and by some people, a witch. This second identification is confirmed by her birthmark above her left eye and the fact that, ominously, her return is heralded by a deluge of falling dead sparrows.

In contrast, Nel does not search for self-knowledge, but finds it none-the-less after the people whom she surrounded herself with have left her. Sula dies and Jude just leaves. Nel is bereft, because, unlike Sula, she does not have a sense of who she is. "Erik Erikson proposed that the major achievement of normal development was a firm and fixed 'sense of identity,'" that Nel lacks. Each woman holds a distinctly different philosophical view of the world (Gergen 41). Gergen suggests that "as one casts out to sea in the contemporary world, modernist moorings are slowly left behind. It becomes increasingly difficult to recall precisely to what essence one must remain true" (150). With

this in mind, Nel's confused position is based on her inability to latch onto a self-generated system to guide her. Her adherence to the codes of proper feminine behavior does not give her the rewards she believed were guaranteed by her decorous behavior.

Instead she traps herself into "attributes considered to be desirable for woman . . . tact, gentleness, awareness of the feelings of others, strong need for security and easy expression of tender feelings" (Gilligan 552). Nel fulfills the paradox which Carol Gilligan outlines: "the very traits that have traditionally defined the 'goodness' of women, their care for and sensitivity of the needs of others, are those that mark them as deficient in moral development" (552). This means that because Nel upholds the proper modes of feminine behavior, she is unable to judge herself, or Sula, in a decontextualized fashion. In fact, I believe that Nel overrides her personal responses, until the very last scene in the novel, in order to maintain external, cultural definition of right and wrong. It is only at the close of the novel that Nel realizes that these categories, and the various other codification of femininity that she supported, are inconsistent with her own true views. Only at the end does she realize that Sula was 'the good one,' and that her own life has been stifled by her inability to accept that life is not guided by categorical imperatives, but is instead situational and subject to personal

idiosyncrasies.

The rebellious behavior of the title character, like Sethe in Beloved, is necessitated by Sula's desire for self-definition. She is transgressive of the mothering role through her lack of husband and children. She does not fulfill the ideals of womanhood held by her town and breaks several cultural restrictions.

Sula, like her mother and grandmother, possesses a sexual energy that the townspeople discern. Although the other women do not comprehend the Peace women's allure, they do know to keep their men away from them. Eva and Hannah Peace's sexual leniency is taken for granted by the community--the women resent them and the men adore them--but both accept them. Relevantly, the male attention these women receive is not the lascivious type of attention paid to prostitutes or "free women." The men in this community respect the sexual power of the Peace women. Therefore, Sula is judged and ostracized by her community, not for her sexual permissiveness, but for the errors she makes in breaking the traditional role of women. Or, perhaps like Sethe, it is her pride which distances the townsfolk from her. Sula, Morrison states in an interview with Robert Stepto, "really behaves like a man . . . She's adventuresome, she trusts herself, she's not scared, she really ain't scared . . . so that quality of masculinity--and I mean this in the pure sense--in a woman at that time

is outrage, total outrage. She can't get away with that" (27). However, Sula does get away with it.

Although she suffers reprisal for her self-development--she is ostracized and feared/hated--Sula dies contented. Grant suggests that "there is no socially recognizable 'good' in Sula, her wholeness must be measured by the dictates of a subjective experientialism. 'I have sung all the songs all the songs I have sung all the songs there are' she muses to herself, finally exhausted with experience (137). Like Camus in The Stranger, Morrison seems to be claiming for Sula a definition of 'goodness' which connects more to an existential 'inner' faith and integrity than with sociometric 'good works' or charity" (Grant 101). Sula is entirely transgressive of the norms of the Bottom that places the men on top.

In contrast Edelberg's view of Sula is quite harsh:

Sula's education and experience in the white mans' world alienates her from the community at large as well. The men of the Bottom label her a bitch and a devil not because she watched her mother burn, or abandoned her grandmother, or betrayed her friend. Sula slept with whitemen, so they said, and they ostracized her. This was the one "unforgivable thing--the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion. The rout from which there was no way back, the dirt

that could not ever be washed away" (p.112). Sula dies alone. White hands bury her; the blacks refuse. (226)

This reading is a bit contrived. Although it is rumored that Sula did sleep with white men, in addition to many other types of sexual relations, I believe Morrison's implies the men rejected and called Sula a bitch in retaliation. She rejected them by leaving. When she returns to the Bottom it is not for them but for her friend Nel. They say she slept with white men, but this is simply one of the excuses the men develop to distance themselves from Sula's utter lack of interest in them.

She is defiant--and delinquent--yet she obtains the greatest amount of self-awareness in the novel. Or more precisely, she is the only female character who is able to enjoy her self-awareness--Eve is thwarted by her injured body and relegation to the home, Hannah dies prematurely, and the novel closes with Nel reevaluation of her restricted life. Sula's acts of transgression, however, are severely admonished. Deborah McDowell submits that Sula resists our search for the conventional 'unified' sensibility or personality. Thus, the reader's charged enterprise--to determine, to understand, and to consolidate meanings--is complicated, if not entirely thwarted by the fact that the novel's title character has not 'center,' no 'self,' no 'ego" (McDowell 92). It is precisely Sula's awareness that

she lacks this essence which spurs her search for self. She rejects the artificial definition of life to which Nel tightly ascribes. Therefore, she is ostracized by the community and dies young and alone. Hirsh notes that "Nel's warning is prophetic: 'You can't do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man' (123). Having children represents for Nel the crucial distinction between the male and the female position. Women, as Eva succeeds in demonstrating, can act like men, but in this novel, they cannot leave their children and get away with it" (424). This reinforces that characters who transgress may attain personal autonomy, but they shall pay the price for their transgressions.

Not long after Sula's return to the Bottom, after she has already become an outcast because of the fear her freedom inspire, and has placed Eva in a Nursing home, Sula then has sex with Jude, Nel's husband. When Eva is forced out of her home, Nel is unhappy, but when she see her husband "down on all fours naked" with Sula she ends her correspondence with her best friend (105).

Now, no one in their right mind would happily greet a naked husband and a naked friend in their own bedroom. But again, like the incident with Chicken Little, I locate Nel's error not the shock and horror she experiences but in her secondary responses. Believing that Sula has betrayed her, Nel cuts Sula out of her life and thereby cuts out half of

her own life. She is trapped in her own code that forces her to pick up the role of the injured unforgiving Wright woman, a second Helen. Unfortunately for Nel, it is just a role rather than a carefully constructed identity that her mother had developed. Nel's betrayal is her own adherence to a false and externally defined role of how she should behave rather than how she actually feels. What she ultimately discovers is that the loss of Sula is far worse than the loss of Jude. Crying, "a fine cry--loud and long--but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow," Nel weeps "'all that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude . . . O Lord, Sula,' she cried, 'girl, girl, girlgirlgirl'" (174).

Interestingly, Jude just leaves--he doesn't talk with his wife. She didn't kick him out, there is no argument. Nel is left wondering:

What am I supposed to do with these old thighs now, just walk up and down these rooms? What good are they, Jesus? . . . are you trying to tell me that I am going to have to go all the way through these days all the way, O my god, to that box with four handles with never nobody settling down between my legs even if I sew up those old pillow cases and rinse down the porch and feed my children and beat the rugs and haul the coal up out of the bin even then nobody, O Jesus . . . if

I knew that somewhere in this world in the pocket of some night I could open my legs to some cowboy lean hips but are you trying to tell me no and O my sweet Jesus what kind of cross is that?"

(111).

Beyond the anguish of Nel's assessment, I find two things very interesting in the way she approaches her future without Jude. Because she is confined to the edicts of proper behavior, it is clear that Nel does not consider the quite real possibility of another lover. Without a husband, Nel will not have sex again. Secondary to that, in her litany of pain, she lists all the wifely duties that she seems to perform in exchange for sex. Therefore, her adherence to the external dictates of domestic womanhood become suspect because of her need for reward. As Judith Lowder Newton states in "Power and the Ideology of 'Woman's Sphere'" that "nineteenth-century manuals and other literature addressed to the 'woman question' demanded that, for a woman to have influence, in effect, meant doing without self-definition, achievement, and control, meant relinquishing power for effacement of the self in love and sacrifice" (in Warhol 767). Although Nel seems to embrace these tenets, in reality her adherence is externally motivated. Her need for "some cowboy lean hips" represents a very different reality that she denies herself in order to maintain her role.

It is precisely this role that Sula entirely rejects. In fact, when the two girls, now aging women, see each other again Nel protests "You didn't love me enough to leave him alone. To let him love me. You had to take him away" (144). These sad words express not only Nel's unabated pain over the absence of Jude, but also the pain from what she believes to be Sula's lack of love for her. In an unexpected retort Sula states "what you mean take him away? I didn't kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn't get over it" (144). If nothing else, you have to admire Sula's conviction in her own self, because uttering these words ensure that she will die alone and that there will not be a reconciliation with Nel in her lifetime.

Sula is not a nice woman. However, she is a self-contented woman, and rupturing codes of the Bottom and other acts of transgression hinted at, but unexplained, are how she defines her unique self. Sula is a problem, as Carol Gilligan defines it Sula is an example of "the problem of women, whose sexuality remains more diffuse, whose perception of self is so much more tenaciously embedded in relationships with others and whose moral dilemmas hold them in a mode of judgement that is insistently contextual" (in Meyer 549). Sula does not follow the limits of an overarching morality, but, instead, believes in situational right and wrong. Nel, in contrast, cannot break from the

structures established by her mother who supports and enforces the external definitions of right and wrong: proper female behavior and sinful female behavior. Morrison describes it this way: "Nel was one of them. One of the spiders whose only thought was the next rung of the web, who dangled in dark dry places suspended by their own spittle, more terrified of the free fall than the snake's breath below . . . Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways" (120). Grant sees the two women as interesting opposites, suggesting that "Nel has been protected from self-knowledge by a factitious, socialized 'innocence' which allows her to categorize Sula as 'bad' even as she enjoys using Sula as scapegoat and 'other.' That she herself may be as 'evil' as Sula, and in fact more so because of her hypocrisy, strikes Nel at the conclusion, when she allows herself to understand the dark implications of her voyeuristic complicity in Chicken Little's death" (101).

Guilt ridden and bereft, Nel acknowledges her true loss is Sula and not Jude. As Julia Kristeva suggests "a woman seldom (although not necessarily) experiences her passion (love and hatred) for another woman without having taken her own mother's place--without having herself become a mother, and especially without slowly learning to differentiate between same beings--as being face to face with her daughter forces her to do" (318). Nel has become her mother and a mother of sons. She experiences her passion toward Sula,

but avoids the significance of her face to face confrontation with Sula until many years after Sula's death.

Patricia Ticiento Clough suggests that 'in realistic narrativity, final authorization is figured in one character's realizing a 'true' or unified subject-identity, the defeat of another character often providing the necessary knowledge for that realization" (115). Sula is the foil for Nel--it is against her that Nel had defined herself as "good" because she upheld the culturally enforced description of motherhood. It is when Nel realizes that Sula was more "true," that she understands the need to break from the restrictive codes of motherhood and propriety that define femininity, codes that are enforced by the dominant American culture and supported by the African American culture as well.

Section V: "Frustrated Femininity in Tar Baby"

In Tar Baby the double components of femininity--beauty and motherhood--espoused by the dominant culture and supported by the African American culture, further my analysis of transgression and reprisal in Morrison's fiction. My assertion is that the female characters in Toni Morrison's novel, Tar Baby, like the women in her other fiction, are confronted with external codes that define their femininity. Utilizing Namoi Wolf's concept of the "Beauty Myth" highlights the power of this external standard over white and non-white women striving to match the ideal of femininity. In conjunction with the pressures for beautification, motherhood is also demanded from women for them to meet the cultural feminine model. To rupture the edicts proffered by the cultural representation of perfect femaleness, the characters in Tar Baby must transgress these external dictates to attain a unique and individual concept of self, which may or may not include personal beauty and/or motherhood.

The two female characters that I discuss are Jadine (Jade) Childes and Margaret (Lanore) Street. This paring of women is unique in Morrison's fiction specifically because Margaret is white and both women fulfil the cultural ideals of beauty. Susan Willis states that in Tar Baby "cultural exiles--both white and black--come together on a Caribbean island where they live out their lives in neatly

compartmentalized bourgeois fashion" (269). These exiles, Jadine and Margaret, embody female ideals dictated by American culture. I use the same focus found in my earlier sections, femininity defined as beauty and motherhood, to analyze these characters and their lack of necessary transgression. Like Pauline Breedlove and Helen Wright, they adhere to the external structures of femininity and are therefore negative examples.

Deborah Baker, while discussing adolescent girls' development of self identity, explains that "for women . . . the need for a positive social identity is the primary motivation behind social comparison; this requires that ingroup be favorably different or positively distinct from outgroup. If this is the case, ingroup membership is associated with high status and prestige" (86). Reading female characters in Tar Baby in this way is complex because these woman desperately strive to fulfill ideals of femininity and, significantly, they succeed: They are both in the "ingroup." After they have attained the externally defined harbingers of femaleness, they begin to doubt the validity of these external structures. Margaret's motherhood has had disastrous results and Jadine's modeling career has undermined her self-conception.

I address the topic of beauty by utilizing Margaret and Jadine, both of whom are ideal. In this novel the character of Jadine is perfection. She is beautiful according to all

standards. She graces the covers of magazines at which Hagar might have gazed. Jadine is highly educated, having received an Art History degree from the Sorbonne. Beautiful and brilliant, Jadine is conflicted because she has aligned herself with the standards offered by the dominant culture. Yet, on a base level she feels that she has somehow sold-out.

She withers in self-doubt at her own superficiality as an artificially enhanced woman when she encounters a coal black woman dressed in a canary yellow top with bare feet and no makeup. In Sula there is also a woman in canary yellow who represents some form of authenticity: Helen Wright's prostitute mother. These two yellow clad women offer alternatives to the female role embodied by the women who watch them. Just as Nel is mesmerized by her grandmother, Jade is awed by this woman:

The vision itself was a woman much too tall. Under her long canary yellow dress Jadine knew there was too much hip, too much bust. The agency would laugh her out of the lobby, so why was she and everybody else in the store transfixed? The height? The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress? The woman walked down the aisle as though her many-colored sandals were pressing gold tracks on the floor. Two upside-down V's were scored into each of her cheeks . . . Then she put

her right elbow into the palm of her left hand and held the eggs aloft between earlobe and shoulder. She looked up then and they saw something her eyes so powerful it had burnt away the eyelashes. (Tar 45-6)

Jadine is dumbstruck by the other's presence and utter beauty, a beauty that goes against all of Jadine's preconceived notions. Eleanor Traylor believes that "in this woman, Jadine catches a glimpse of an essence, a beauty, an assurance, a womanliness, an indwelling elegance, a nature, an authenticity that she had never known before and certainly not achieved" (141). The women's spell over Jadine is only broken when, having proceeded outside the grocery store with her two gleaming white eggs, the woman returns Jadine's stare, appraises her, and spits dismissively on the ground: "the woman turned her head sharply around to the left and looked right at Jadine. Turned those eyes too beautiful for eyelashes on Jadine and, with a small parting of her lips, shot an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement" leaving Jadine gaping at her through the window (48). By juxtaposing these two images, Morrison highlights one of the tensions vocalized throughout the text, the concept of beauty. Jadine freely discusses the ramifications of buying into the culturally enforced concepts of femininity.

Robert O'Meally notes that "this African woman with

'tar-black fingers' mocks Jadine's career successes (in something like the way Invisible Man's grandfather spoils his successes) and haunts her dreams. She appears in Jadine's Eloë nightmare in which a group of black women, including Jadine's mother and Ondine, point their breasts accusingly at the wayward daughter" (36). Jadine cannot "figure out why the woman's insulting gesture had derailed her--shaken her out of proportion to incident. Why she had wanted that woman to like and respect her. It had certainly taken the zing out of her magazine cover as well as her degree" (Tar 45-47). What is clear is that Jadine's ego is fragile.

Even though she is aware that her reaction is disproportionate to the event, she lets a stranger erode her own accomplishments. This indicates that her self-concept is far more linked to external measures of success rather than linked to an internal barometer of success. Elaine Showalter states that "many critical metaphors, theories and dilemmas, such as the notion of a double-voiced discourse, the imagery of the veil, the mask, or the closet; and the problem of autonomy versus mimicry and civil disobedience" (170) are shared throughout the world. Jadine's situation of double-consciousness, of supporting the American and African American concepts of beauty, lead to her disrupted sense of self.

Although focusing primarily upon black woman's struggle

within a structure defined by whiteness, Morrison does not describe white woman as necessarily winning either. In Tar Baby, Margaret Street easily embodies the standards of beauty, she is after all a beauty queen. However, her ideal of femininity is also comprised of images of motherhood. Margaret's desire to embody this womanly ideal leads her toward a sadistic relationship with her infant son, Michael. Her desire to see herself as a loving, healing mother enables her to inflict injury upon her son which, in turn, causes him to weep so that she can then comfort him.

This twisted relationship develops because of Margaret's need to love and be loved according to her concept of the feminine ideal. A large part of Margaret's problem stems from her overriding sense of inferiority. Although removed from the poverty of her youth and still possessing the great beauty that captured her husband's heart, she is lacking a genuine sense of self.

Analyzing Margaret, I focus upon the definition of femininity as motherhood. Margaret discovers the falsity of the "competitive American society" which "teaches that beauty makes people lovable. In other words, being attractive gives them the power of commanding love" (House 182). It must also be remembered that Margaret comes from a poor background and grew up isolated from her many brothers and sisters in a trailer in Main: Her parents "gave her care, but withdrew attention" (Tar 57).

Their strength they gave to the others who were not beautiful; their knowledge, what information they had they did not give to this single beautiful one . . . But Margaret always loved the trailer best for there the separateness she felt had less room to grow in . . . So when she got married eight months out of high school, she did not have to leave home, she was already gone; she did not have to leave them; they had already left her. (Tar 57)

Margaret's isolation as a child and youth stems from her beauty. She, at this point, resents that she inspires suspicion and jealousy from those around her. In fact, her beauty is such an anomaly in her family, that her father goes to great lengths to demonstrate to his community that her magnificent red hair is a genetic throw back to his aged aunts, who he invites to visit although there has been no contact between them in many years. He fears that her remarkable beauty, defined as luminescent white skin, striking blue eyes, and luxurious red hair, will cause suspicion of his paternity. Later, upon meeting Valerian and marrying him, Margaret fully enjoys the power she finds in her beauty, enjoying that her beauty "had made something kneel down in him [Valerian] the first time he saw her" (Tar 243).

Margaret then takes on the role that Eva Feder Kittay

calls the Temptress, "generally a woman of the 'lower classes' . . . [that] distracts men from obligations within the social order and tempts them to take a woman from outside his appropriate class" ((276). Emblematic of this, Valerian admits that he is an old fool who married "a high school dropout off the back of a truck" (Tar 70). Eleanor W. Traylor suggests that Valerian "'married Miss Main' (p. 53), a beauty queen whose name is Margaret and who, he discovers, after years of marriage, has never been and has no possibility of becoming a woman" (138). The reason that Traylor believes that Margaret will not become a woman, is due to her adherence to external codes dictating femininity. Margaret does fulfill these roles, at least superficially, but she has no self. Margaret's identification as a Temptress have two serious ramifications: 1) Margaret allows Valerian to bully and humiliate her 2) she strives to fulfill the role outlined by her new class position through affectations and producing a child.

Margaret comes to defines herself as a beauty, a wife, and a doting mother. However, it becomes apparent that the need to be a succoring mother is such a paramount part of Margaret's identity that her motherhood becomes sadistic. Obviously, this does not create a close bond between mother and child, and Michael estranges himself from both his parents as an adult.

Eleanor Traylor inaccurately states that "Margaret, the

beautiful child-lady, is resentful of the attention that now she must share with the beautiful baby and cannot resist pricking him, from time to time, with pins or burning him with cigarettes or cutting his flesh, ever so gently, with knives. Valerian learns of this, as we do, years after it has happened" (139). The problem with this reading is that Traylor states that it is jealous rather than a different form of extreme insecurity that leads Margaret to her heinous acts. I do not believe that Margaret's pleasure comes only from the power she wields over son, but more from the dependency and need for love that she creates through her abuse of Michael. She secures her status as the embodiment of the feminine ideal by appearing to meet the cultural demands of femininity as a loving and, more importantly, loved mother.

Ondine also crosses the barriers of her position by befriending, then later hating, Margaret Street. Ondine's first transgression is quickly stopped by Valerian's disapproval of his wife's fondness for her servant, but her succeeding, and more significant acts of transgression are left unchecked. Ultimately, Ondine comes to blows with Margaret: "Ondine slipped out of her zircon-studded shoes and raced around the table at the target of all her anger . . . and with the back of her hand slapped Margaret across the face" (Tar 208).

The reprisal for this act is minimized only because

Ondine discloses the reason for her hatred, screaming: "'You cut him up. You cut your baby up. Made him bleed for you. For fun you did it. Made him scream, you, you freak. You crazy white freak'" (209). Ondine turns to the others who are mesmerized by her disclosure "'She stuck pins in his behind. Burned him with cigarette. Yes, she did, I saw her; I saw his little behind. She burned him!'" (Tar 209). Although Ondine's abuse of Margaret is vindicated, Ondine then realizes that she, herself, has actually failed to transgress. She has kept the secret that Margaret physically and psychologically abused Michael.

It is only at the close of the novel, when Margaret's abuse is exposed by Ondine that Margaret relinquishes the pretenses to maternal concern and begins to develop a more complete sense of self. It must be noted, however, that this new empowered self is still in accord with the cultural definition of femininity. she becomes the doting wife.

Valerian's demise into his feebleness, a weakness developed by his final acknowledgement of the horror of his marriage and his failure as a father, is symbolized by his wife's taking control of herself and him. Margaret becomes the one in charge looking through his clothes tsk, tsking over the shabbiness of some of his items and cooing over his penchant for natural fibers. "Everything he owns has to be made by Mother Nature. But what a mess. It'll take me days to get it all sorted" (Tar 277). This new Margaret is quite

a contrast to the earlier women who needs "her little victory with the mango," (Tar Baby 25) her ability to both recognize it and get it into her mouth, in order to concentrate on the table conversation. This new Margaret no longer whispers, "oh, I'm sorry" after leaving the salad forks on the table while angrily thinking, "What was so awful about that?" (Tar 65). No, this is the new Margaret, the one who has finally 'dreamed the dream she should have'. She has confronted her past and has made a future for herself by not only accepting her sadism, but sharing the responsibility for it with Valerian and Ondine.

And in this act of self actualization, Margaret has toppled Valerian and humbled Ondine. After grappling with his "sin of innocence, or ignorance," Valerian is reduced to the dottering old man that Margaret calls him in the beginning.

The servant Ondine Childs, Jadine's aunt, is also important in this section. Ondine is exceptional because her role as a woman is linked to her ability to be a wife, a domestic servant, and-- without giving birth--a mother. Patricia Hill Collins notes that "black women receive respect and recognition within their local communities for innovative and practical approaches not only to mothering their own 'blood' children, but also to being othermothers to the children in their extended family networks" (in Glenn 55-6). Ondine performs the mothering role first for her

niece, Jadine, then young Margaret, then finally Michael Street. Ultimately, Ondine is punished for her performance of the mothering role. She is ignored by Jadine, rejected by Margaret, and abandoned by Michael.

Ondine's relationship to Margaret is problematic on several counts. When Margaret, a terrible lonely and insecure teen woman, first comes to Valerian's Philadelphia home, she latches on to Ondine as both a friend and advisor. Only after this friendship is forbidden by Valerian does Margaret begin to treat Ondine as a servant, and then her interaction with Ondine is worse than if they had never been friends. Margaret's attempts to fulfil the role that Valerian has established for her makes her a more rigid task master than if Margaret had come understand her authoritarian position in her own fashion. As bell hooks suggests "historically, many black women experience white woman as the white supremacist group who most directly exercised power over them, often in a manner far more brutal and dehumanizing than that of racist white men" (in Meyer 489). This is in fact the case in the Street home. Valerian commands because he was raised in the position of power, where as Margaret's attempts to fulfill her social position make her relationship with Ondine conflicted, petty, and overly dictatorial.

Ondine returns Margaret's dislike with a venom that shocks her employers, her niece and even her husband. In

fact hooks suggests that "black women have no abiding admiration of white women as competent, complete people, whether vying with them for the few professional slots available to woman in general, or moving their dirt from one place to another, they regarded them as willful children, pretty children, mean children, but never as real adults capable of handling the real problems of the world" (in Meyer 490). Ondine's response to Margaret reflects this relationship, and is especially apparent at the fateful Christmas dinner when Margaret's home cooked meal failed and her guests cancel out, including her son, Michael. It is at this point that both Ondine and Sydney are invited to dinner and the undercurrent of hate running between both Ondine and Margaret is revealed.

Josie Campbell states that "Jadine is an outright orphan. She is, however, doubly adopted--first by her aunt and uncle, and subsequently by their wealthy white employer who acts as her benefactor. It is the tug-of-war between these two sets of adoptive parents and their value systems (seemingly compatible until the arrival of Son, who introduces yet another value system) that constitutes the center of action" (396).

At the same time that Morrison focuses upon motherhood and domesticity, she turns a critical eye toward the modeling and fashion industries and demonstrates the ramifications felt by women who follow these impossible

beauty guidelines. One of the most powerful examples of this is the earlier discussed horrific demise of Hagar. In vain attempts to win back her lost love, she sets out to give herself a "make-over." Literally trying to eradicate herself and become like the woman on the pages of a magazine. Hagar's struggle to become one of these women, any of them, all of them fails miserably. Due to her inability to transform herself into the beauty ideal, to change herself from black to white, she dies. Juxtaposed to Hagar, I place Jadine.

Trudier Harris proposes that "our negative reaction to Jadine, however, is predicated upon the inability of members of the culture to applaud the traits she has when they appear in feminine guise; we would readily accept all that Jadine is, and most of her actions, if the doer of the action were male instead of female" (129). This statement is problematic on several counts, not the least of which is the suggestion of a universal dislike for the character Jadine. The second aspect is that a character like Jadine can only be a woman, and if similar actions were transposed to a male character, I believe the character would fail.

Jadine is one of the women in the magazines at whom Hagar stares. However, Jadine's conformity with the model ideal does not relieve her from the pressure to acknowledge beauty in her own blackness, a blackness that is nearly eradicated by outward manifestations. Various critics,

(Harris, Otten) suggest that the key to Jadine is her ejection of authentic black womanhood.

Instead of rejecting her blackness, I believe that Jadine is aware of her beauty as a black woman. She takes full advantage of the fact that she is considered beautiful by both the African American culture and the dominant white culture. She fulfills what "Valentine has suggested [as] the concept of 'biculturation' to describe the relationship of blacks to white society. This concept assumes that blacks have been simultaneously socialized into two different cultural systems; white Euro-American and black Afro-American" (Dill 37). Jadine is conscious that she operates in two distinct environments, but makes the distinction based upon class rather than color, although in the Street home the two are inextricably linked. She loves and feels comfortable with her working class aunt and uncle, who are black, and also socializes and is at ease with the upperclass Streets, who are white.

Kimberly Williams Crenshaw believes that "this dual positioning, or as some scholars have labeled it, double jeopardy, renders women of color vulnerable to the structural, political and representational dynamics of both race and gender subordinates" (247). There is no doubt that this problematic situation exists for black women, the characters of Pauline and Pecola are heartrending examples of this, but Jadine uses the model to her own advantage.

Jadine ascribes to what Gergen calls the "pastiche personality" which he describes as "a social chameleon, constantly borrowing bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation" (150). This "pastiche personality" is not limited to black womanhood. So why is it that because Jadine is black, the other characters and critics worry that she is not black enough, not fulfilling social constructions of black womanhood?

Patricia J Williams, in a self-referential essay states "my raciality is socially constructed, and I experience it as such. I feel my black self as an eddy of conflicted meanings--and meaninglessness--in which my self can get lost, in which agency and consent are tumbled in constant motion" (333). In much the same way, Jadine finds her socially constructed self to be conflicted. She worries about Ryke, Michael, Margaret, and Son's perception of her black self. In fact, after seeing the woman in the yellow dress, she states that she feels "lonely and inauthentic" (Tar 48).

Jadine ponders her situation as a "biculturally" identified woman who must fulfill externally codes of black womanhood, thinking:

I guess the person I want to marry is him [Ryke],
but I wonder if the person he wants to marry is me
or a black girl? And if it isn't me he wants, but

any black girl who looks like me, talks and acts like me, what will happen when he finds out that I hate ear hoops, that I don't have to straighten my hair, that Mingus puts me to sleep, that sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside--not American--not black--just me?

(Tar 48)

Has she, in fact, become what, as hooks suggests, "a fair-skinned black female who may be able to feel that she is lovely and desirable because of her skin color [and who] may rely so much on looks to negotiate her way through daily life that she will not develop other areas of her life, like a grounded personality or her intellectual skills"? (Sisters 92). Or is Jadine suffering from one of the more restrictive aspects of the socially constructed codes of femininity? This code not only forces a black women to fulfill the cultural edicts of beauty and femininity espoused by the dominant culture, but also the images of black womanhood necessitating the "natural properties" of an unknown ancestral woman. Jadine must navigate the fine line between being a light skinned woman who has upper-class aspirations and accomplishments and a "high yella" about whom Gideon says "It's hard for them not to be white people. Hard, I'm telling you. Most never make it" (Tar 155). One model is simply a woman trying to make it in America, the other is a black woman trying to escape herself. Although

she is constantly read as an inauthentic black woman--a sell out, I read Jadine's character as a black woman trying to make a life for herself within the context of her world which is American, African American, and European.

This is not to say that Jadine is unaffected by the problematic relationships between races and classes. She finds that her relationship to a European man is undermined by the social construction of black womanhood, and her casual conversations with the Streets are rife with equally problematic figurations. Michael Street believes that Jadine should give up her life style, which she has obtained through hard work, the benevolence of the Streets, and the good luck to be born both bright and beautiful. Michael holds a higher social position, by birth right, and can afford to spend his youth rejecting the financial and class benefits that will ultimate come to him regardless of his "anthropological" position. Michael condemns Jadine for not joining him in the ghettos and living off the earnings of home made pottery. He calls her as a sell out, explaining that she has been coopted.

Similarly, in conversations with Margaret, and then later Son, she has to fight for her right to be the a self-defined woman. Son Green has intruded the Street home, and in an unusual turn of events, becomes one of the members of the island community. She is stuck in the position of defending Son, the very man she fears. Trudier Harris

states:

when the latter couple's [The Childses] mulatto niece, a successful international model named Jadine Childs, arrives for a visit, and when a mysterious black man, Son Green, intrudes shortly thereafter, the stage is set for a reenactment of racial roles usually confined to U.S. soil. Class enters as Jadine and Son struggle to present the best path to self-fulfillment and understanding of racial heritage. ("Solo" 12)

The struggles between Jadine and Son do take on class issues. However, the character of Jadine is often times represented by critics who wish that she were someone other than she is. Much in the way that some black critics complain Morrison's representations of black men is stereotypical, I find the character of Jadine is read one-dimensionally. She is often analyzed as inauthentic, instead of as I see her, which is questioning the way she can figure herself as a black woman in a white ruled world.

Michel Fabre states that Jadine's Paris "appears as a social paradise in which a black woman is welcome and desired and loved, especially when she is fair-skinned and European-looking. But Jadine increasingly wonders whether her French lover is attracted to her because of a supposedly exotic quality in her or because of her real self" (289). Robert O'Meally states that "Son accuses Jadine of being a

kind of Tar Baby, a tricky white man's creation set to waylay black men whose real home is down in the brier patch" (35).

In recalling the scene when Son and she fight, prior to their love affair, Terry Otten states that Jadine "assumes he is going to rape her, but he returns, 'Rape? Why do you little white girls think somebody's trying to rape you?' condemned as white, Jadine feebly responds, 'White . . . I am not . . . You know I'm not white', but Son captures her in a truth (121). It is no wonder she fears him" (67).

The problem with the way Otten renders this scene is that, Otten does not acknowledge that Son has forcibly "uncrossed her wrists and swung her around, holding her from behind in the vise of his arms. His chin was in her hair" and threatens to throw her out a window (Tar 121). A threat he actualizes in New York, when he hangs her out the window until her arms ache and the neighbors call the police. Otten's harsh reading of Jadine, calling her response to Son "feeble" also dismisses her power--I think he oversimplifies the character of Jadine. His read on her is as a fair skinned black girl trying to be white, whereas I see her as a fair skinned black woman trying to make it in the white world, and in her own understanding of her black world.

Kimberle Williams Crenshaw states that cultural "representation [of woman of color] confirm the feminist claim that women are legitimate targets of violence and the

more specific observation that these targets are often represented with distinct racialized images" (25). She highlights the stereotypical representation of black women as "wild and animalistic" (253), confirmed by Son reference to her smell.

Jadine's class consciousness is undeniable, but I think it limits the character of Jadine to attribute this to color. Fabre notes that "Jadine then realizes that such confident elegance is not acquired through French universities or haute couture; she starts feeling unauthentic and lonely, a sort of hybrid, whose Sorbonne degree and photograph on the cover of *Elle* in no way make her superior to the unforgettable African woman whose image now haunts her so much that she feels compelled to reconcile herself with that 'black dimension' of her identity" (Fabre, From Harlem, 290). Considering Sidney and Ondine, both definitely black and self-defined, are certainly class conscious. They just happen to place themselves in the framework of working-class, whereas Jadine has upper-class footing and aspirations.

Otten continues, "Son enters paradise like the biblical serpent, articulates Jadine's forbidden desires, muted by her counterfeit identity, and galvanizes her into action. In his insistence that she acknowledge the 'darker' side of herself, the authentic black self obscured in the distorted mirror of her adopted Eden, Son forces Jadine to see the

'beast' in the glass" (67). Perhaps, but Son's "Eden" must also be acknowledged. His Eden of Eloë is by no means an easy for women, black women, to become self actualized.

Thinking that the country woman he knew had it hard:

Well, it hadn't been easy for Francine and it hadn't been easy for Rosa or his mother. Not easy at all. It was hard and he believed it scared her to think of how hard . . . It took all the grown-up strength you had to stay there and stay alive and keep a family together. (Tar 268)

Why, then, does Son want Jadine to live there. He wants her to fulfil the role of a black matriarch, and external definition of femininity that has no connection to Jadine's figuration of her self and this is the primary reason that their relationship fails. Lepow suggest that "Jadine is questing for and creating self (Lee 355). But because it is in many ways easier for her to know who she is not than who she is" (374), she leaves Son. She knows that she does not want to become the type of women that his ideological framework demands: a domesticated, church going, pie baking, man pampering women. Lepow believes that "both Jade and Son know, long before they know one another, that the individual's only possible redeemer is self. They lose their grasps on the knowledge when they try to become one another's Messiahs" (375). Jadine reclaims this grasp on her own development by refusing to participate in Son's

fantasies of the perfect woman.

Jadine suffers by comparison to the coal black woman who stride across the floor of a local supermarket. This woman's deep blackness, and a beauty so powerful that it seems to have singed off her eyelashes, levels Jadine. The woman's utter disregard for Jadine, and demonstration of contempt as she spits, rattles Jadine's feeling of self-confidence. Morrison uses Jadine's character, which I place in direct contrast with Hagar, as a way of demonstrating the impossibility of meeting standards of beauty. She is not white enough, not black enough. Either way, a black woman loses.

This novel not only expands upon issues of racism and colorism set forth in the other novels, but also deals directly with class issues. The character of Jadine, like Milkman in Song of Solomon, is the figure who is able to operate successfully in both worlds presented in Tar Baby, and therefore she is the one who must deal directly with the problems presented.

CHAPTER III: "Masculinity and Power: Men will be Men"

The focus of this final chapter is the male characters in Morrison's novels and how they work within or against the definitions of masculinity. Michael Kimmel states that "what it means to be a man in America depends heavily upon one's class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, region of the country. To acknowledge these differences among men, we must speak of **masculinities**" (5). Therefore, in this chapter I consider the definition of masculinity of the dominant American culture, the African American culture, and the slave culture presented in Morrison's fiction.

Much in the way I applied the theme of transgression and reprisal to the female characters who are restricted by definitions of femininity, I investigate the struggle for autonomy that male characters undergo as they adhere to or break from the limitations of masculine ideals. As in the earlier section, I shall demonstrate how these novels reflect America culture. Diane J. Goodman suggests "men tend to define themselves through separation and autonomy, and see themselves as independent from other people" (3) and states that her investigation focuses upon "sense of self, sense of self in relation to others/relationships, and ontology (sense of being in the world)" (4). According to this standard, the definition of masculinity is the possession of power and strength, be it physical, economic, or emotional strength.

As Iris Marion Young states, "male domination refers to the organization of a particular institution or the pattern of institutional organization in a whole society in which men have some degree of unreciprocated authority or control over women, and/or men have greater control than women over the operations of the institutions or set of institutions" (28). The significance of the male power position as above women is, however, not what I find most important in my analysis of the externally defined criteria for masculinity.

What I am most concerned with is the restrictive force of the cultural requirement of power, economic clout and emotional stoicism on Morrison's male characters, and how these male characters break from these definitions to attain self-hood. Joan Wallach Scott noting Nancy Chodorow's work highlights one aspect of interest, the "persistent associations of masculinity with power" (163). Young also notes that the "description and explanation of male domination still require reference to material relations of dependence and autonomy" (32), linking my second definition of male categorization to economic strength. As I move through the novels chronologically, I shall highlight the social/cultural restrictions governing the men and influencing the ways they exert their sense of self.

Michael Kimmel states that

Robert Brannon brilliantly reduced the male sex

role into four basic rules of manhood. The first and perhaps most important rule is "NO Sissy Stuff": One can never do anything that even remotely hints of the feminine. The second rule, "Be a Big Wheel," indicates that masculinity is measured by power, wealth success. The third rule reminds men to "Be a Sturdy Oak," since real men show no emotions, are emotionally reliable by being emotionally inexpressive. And finally, "Give 'em Hell" meant to exude an aura of manly daring and aggression. Always take risks, go for it. These four rules sum up the masculine predicament. (282)

I apply Brannon's definition to the following three novels: Beloved, Song of Solomon, and Tar Baby. Significant to my readings of these novels is the discussion of black masculinity and the combined experiences of Morrison's male characters striving to meet the ideals proffered by the dominant culture as well as the African American culture. Clyde Franklin decries the problematic situation of black masculine ideals, stating "beyond a shadow of a doubt, being black and male in the United States is hazardous to one's health because black males in America continue to face disproportionate dangers" (in Brod 155). Franklin outlines the competing images of masculinity that black men confront. He focuses upon the very real danger of physical/violent

ideal of masculinity as well as the restrictive nature of the economic/hierarchical model of masculinity. I utilize his concepts throughout this chapter.

In Beloved the slavery system so restricts the movements of the men on Sweet Home they use other methods to define themselves. Similarly in Song of Solomon the image of masculinity that the Dead Men grapple with is constantly revised by each successive generation's move forward in the culture, moving from the development of Lincoln's Haven, to Macon's ownership of many holdings in the town and to the resort place of Honore. The third Macon Dead, Milkman, breaks with these images of success; he transgresses some of the societal definitions and eventually undergoes a rebirth. Unfortunately, Milkman's path to self-discovery is curtailed by his best friend Guitar, whose own adherence to definitions of masculinity as violence force him to battle and perhaps kill Milkman.

In the novels the Bluest Eye and Sula, the male characters are peripheral. I shall, therefore, use them to support the other novels rather than devote entire sections to their development of male characters struggling against the masculine ideal. It is important, however, to note that in Sula the men living in the Jim Crow South define their manhood by their jobs and their sexuality. In The Bluest Eye the figure of Cholly demonstrates what the rules and regulations do to a man if he does not transgress them to

attain autonomy.

In Tar Baby, the restrictions governing male behavior are clearly outlined. There are four men presented: Valerian the ultra-rich, ultra-controlling white man; his servant, Sidney Childs, a refined "Philadelphia Negro"; Son, the stowaway who hides in the Street household until discovered by the screaming Margaret Street; and Gideon, called Yardman, the native islander who is servant to the servants. With these four men, all slightly stereotypical in their characteristics, I am able to explore enforced standards governing masculinity.

I shall explore, in this third chapter, how images of masculinity are deeply tied to the male characters' abilities to be powerful. As in the previous two chapters I shall trace the characters who transgress these ideals in order to attain personal autonomy.

Section I: "Making Men in Beloved"

In Beloved, I focus primarily on the definition of masculinity as physical and emotional strength. James Reimeer believes that "just as psychologist and sociologist . . . have increasingly brought to out attention the limitations and frequently self-destructive nature of many of our ideals of manliness, so can a men's studies approach to American literature . . . reveal the ways in which manly ideals can restrict and complicate men's lives, often interfering with the satisfaction of their basic human needs" (295). I use this suggestion to analyze the restrictions placed upon the men in Beloved and their adherence to masculine codes. Most of the men in this novel are slaves or ex-slaves, runaways. Hazel Carby states in "Slave and Mistress" that black manhood "could not be achieved or maintained because of the inability of the slave to protect the black woman" (35). Therefore, the definition of masculinity of the men in Beloved has less to do with their social, economic protective power as it does in the other novels. Sethe's husband Halle does possess both manifestations of masculinity because he is allowed to hire himself out to other farms for pay, which he subsequently uses to buy his mother's freedom. This act is what wins him Sethe's heart and hand. This situation is unique to Halle. The other slaves on Sweet Home must prove their masculinity to themselves and others through physical accomplishments or

cleverness.

As Clyde W. Franklin, II, notes in The Changing Definitions of Masculinity, "masculinity and physical strength became inextricably interwoven" (7). Delineating between "White Masculine Roles" and "Black Masculine Roles," Franklin states that "if a White male is to be considered masculine in our society, he must embrace certain obligations and expectations associated with domination, competition, the Calvinist work ethic, and violence" (47). I find Franklin's work, and many of his hypotheses, extremely problematic; however, the two definitions above will enable me to formulate a basis for discussing the concept of masculinity in this chapter. As an example, Sixo claims his male status by walking fifteen miles to meet his woman, making love with her in the woods, and walking fifteen miles back to Sweet Home in time to work the next day. It is against these two representations of manhood that Paul D measures his own manliness.

Paul D is the main focus of my analysis of the struggle for masculine self-identity found in Beloved. Barbara Schapiro contends that "the novel reveals how the condition of enslavement in the external world, particularly the denial of one's status as a human subject, has deep repercussions in the individual's internal world" (194). Nothing could be more true for the character of Paul D than the fact that "these internal resonances are so profound

that even if one is eventually freed from external bondage, the self will still be trapped in an inner world that prevents a genuine experience of freedom" (194).

Paul D's life and struggle becomes paramount to my investigation of transgression as a means to autonomy because of several factors. The most significant aspect of Paul D's development is his constant self-referential analysis of masculine ideals. Throughout the readers' contact with Paul D's inner struggle, we encounter his various self-comparisons to the other men in the novel. The second aspect, of less import, is Paul D's continual change of environment. Paul D is represented as first a slave on Sweet Home, struggling with the masculine ideals embodied by Halle, Sixo, and the other Pauls. At that point he must also contend with the assessments of Mr. Garner and schoolteacher. Later, in prison, Paul D struggles to meet the mark set by the other male prisoners. This section culminates with his encounter with the American Indians and activates his struggle for self-definition. He attains this self-knowledge after breaking from his earlier delineations of manhood and returning to Sethe with new found understanding of himself and his place within the world.

Throughout his earlier manifestations of himself Paul D lacks autonomy and focuses upon the basic and urgent need for self-preservation. He has not yet begun to search for self-knowledge, which Kenneth Gergen explains is "the idea

of the single, conscious self as the critical unit of society. Descartes' dictum 'I think therefore I am' is emblematic. Decisions should issue from private thought, not authorities or other persons" (160). It takes Paul D time to break from the authoritative restrictions. It is not until he re-encounters Sethe after 18 years of separation, that he has a more self-defined concept of masculinity. Through his life with Sethe, his remembrance of his past, his unfairness to her, and his later repentance, Paul D becomes a self-sustaining man, relinquishing the earlier models that barred him from self-knowledge.

In retracing this development with the support of details of the novel, the story must return to Sweet Home and three events that occurred the day the slaves run. The escape fails before it had even began. Sixo is chained, Sethe is restricted to the house to care for Mrs. Garner and then beaten and molested, and schoolteacher is suspicious. When they all tried to run, only Sethe and her children made it off the farm. Paul D is caught and collared, with a bit forced into his mouth; Sixo is tied, burned, and ultimately shot. And it is at this time that Paul D's concepts of masculinity begins to take true form because in the space of one day he thrice witnesses his prior idols falter or flourish. He witnesses Halle, mentally broken, "sitting by the churn . . . [with] butter all over his face" (69),

then he hears Sixo's death/victory scream "Seven-O," and finally has a confrontation with the rooster, Mister. In the space of one day, all of Paul D's prior conceptions about what it means to be a man are destroyed and it takes him a lifetime to construct his own views.

The significance of these events can not be underestimated. Not long into his reacquaintance with Sethe does Paul D learn what had happened to Sethe in the barn. He realizes that Halle witnessed Sethe's abuse and that "whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him like a twig" and tells her so (Beloved 68). This new understanding of Halle's breakdown augments Paul D's earlier understanding of Halle's power as a male role model, one which Paul D felt he failed to measure up to. Although, Marcellus Blount, citing Washington's Up from Slavery, suggests that "black males neither are, nor desire to be, 'men,' in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century traditional sense of that term: to have power, to choose their own destiny, to be equal to others in the society (especially other males), to vote" (96), Hale had represented this manhood. And it is clear that Paul D had wanted to fulfill this externally defined role. Utilizing Washington's definition of masculinity, it becomes clear that the Sweet Home men must define their masculinity according to a different system.

Recalling the horror in the barn, Paul D defends

Halle's manliness when the outraged Sethe gasps "He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air?"

(Beloved 69). Sethe goes on to think how nice it would have been for her had she too gone mad at the time and "how sweet it that would have been; the two of them back by the milk shed, squatting by the churn, smashing cold, lumpy butter into their faces with not a care in the world" (Beloved 70).

Schapiro suggests that at this moment "Sethe regards Halle as the ultimate betrayer: he witnessed her rape, . . . but did not protest or try to protect her" (205). To this Paul D explains that "a man ain't a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddamn minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can't chop down because they're inside" (Beloved 69). With this sentiment Paul D rejects the codes of masculinity he had wanted to emulate and his estimation of proper manhood is linked to newer, kinder, assessments.

Prior to this instance, Paul D's earlier estimations of Halle focused entirely upon Halle's ability and willingness to work extra to buy his family's freedom. Jeff Hearn, while defining masculinity in a Marxist study of masculinity, suggests that "the realm of paid work has been and remains important for the creation of men and definitions of masculinity" (19), therefore this influences not only the men on Sweet Home who are mostly prohibited from this type of masculinity, but is also problematic for

the other male characters in Morrison's fiction who are limited in their ability to fulfill this definition.

Although I shall be unable to include the following characters in my analysis, due to the limitation of my scope, I feel it is profitable to mention the peripheral characters who struggle with this aspect of masculinity: In Sula, the character of Jude is problematic because of his inability to attain work on the tunnel, a limitation that is felt by the Bottom's other men too, but it is this which propels Jude into marriage. In Song of Solomon, the figures of the Porter and other underemployed men suffer because of their lack of money and power usually obtained through employment. In The Bluest Eye it is precisely this limitation that thwarts Cholly.

In Beloved the fact that Halle had already purchased his mother, Baby Suggs, and had begun to collect for his wife daunted Paul D while they were on Sweet Home. He concluded that it was this act, along with other signs of manliness hidden from Paul D, that had induced Sethe to choose Halle above the rest of the Sweet Home men. This perceived lack humbled and demeaned Paul D in his own eyes. When he wonders how much his own price would be, he assesses himself as less valuable than Halle and begins to wonder what his own brother's price had been and where on this scale of manpower he would have been placed. By supporting Halle, Paul D indicates his belief in a newly developing

code of masculinity, and that Halle's weakness is not a lack of manliness, but instead the compunctions of a human heart.

This last point touches deeply to Paul D's core, where beat his own "red, red heart" that he had hoped to lock up for all time in an impregnable "tobacco tin" (Beloved 117). By absolving Halle for his humanity, Paul D absolves himself of his earlier weakness--his failure to meet the code of masculinity defined by Halle's work and Sixo's bravery, discussed below--and perhaps precipitates the unhinging of his closed heart box. Hidden inside is the heart that Beloved forcibly exposes though her magical ability to move him physically, then mentally, and ultimately sexually.

In this heart Paul D hid tiny pieces of love because "the best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one" (Beloved 45). Sethe rejects this idea of love, or as Askeland suggests "Sethe refuses the only seeming alternatives to her love: Paul D suggestion to 'love small' and Ella's advice 'don't love nothing' (92). Because Sethe "had reclaimed her freedom to love; she could no longer allow schoolteacher to invade, contaminate, and claim the selves of her children, 'her best thing'" (797). Askeland continues, stating that "this refusal to love marks Ella and the community as being unable to claim the freedom to love, just as Sethe's marks her as

one who has overstepped" (798). Sethe is transgressive because of her love and although severely punished, she becomes autonomous. Paul D, however, wishes to avoid insolence because he cannot face the pain of reprisal, or the pain that is risked by loving. Therefore, as he coupled with Beloved in the back shed "he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made . . . as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, 'Red Heart. Red heart,' over and over again" (Beloved 117). Importantly, his moment is not what drives Paul D from Sethe, and it is not the rupture for which he must make amends, that comes later when Stamp Paid explains that Sethe had killed her child and had hoped to kill them all when schoolteacher arrived. No, this moment ultimately enables Paul D to reenter Sethe's life for the third and final time.

His rediscovered heart allows him to feel the overpowering love that Sethe had felt toward her children, to understand the mother-love that kills, and humble himself before her as a penitent. It is here that Paul D begins to break from strict dichotomies of right and wrong and to comprehend that the need for insurrection--as horrific as Sethe's act or as banal as his own--sometimes promotes a truer, more honest self-concept. Paul D is not a sinner nor a saint; he is middling in between and his struggle to

emulate the other men he encounters evaporates as he acknowledges his own conception and fulfillment of a male ideal. The counterpoint to Paul D's earlier conception of manhood represented by Halle is Sixo.

The power of Sixo lay in his belief in himself. Even after schoolteacher beat him "to show him that definitions belonged to the definers--not the defined" (Beloved 191), Sixo remained a man in his eyes and everyone else's. The question of manhood is constantly addressed by the slaves on Sweet Home and by their owners, first Garner then schoolteacher. Relating the merits of the other slaves to their claim of masculinity, and then connecting this to the edicts of Garner, provokes the questions "Was that it? Is that where the manhood lay? In the naming done by a whiteman who was supposed to know? Who gave them the privilege not of working but of deciding how to?" (Beloved 125). In direct contrast, the instructions of schoolteacher "taught them otherwise . . . They were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race" (Beloved 125). Paul D waivers between these oppositional views of manhood, whereas Sixo remains aloof.

Sixo, "indigo with a flame-red tongue," (Beloved 21) never hesitates nor doubts his manhood. And next to this example of masculinity Paul D feels palsy. He did not possess the power to meet and secure a thirty-mile woman, he

did not devise ways to cook potatoes in the earth, nor did he have a tree such as Brother for a lover, brother, friend. Even holding Sethe in his arms and gazing at her scared back which Amy Denver had called a tree, Paul measures himself and falls short: "Now there was a man, and that was a tree. Himself lying in the bed and the 'tree' lying next to him didn't compare" (Beloved 230).

Sixo always possessed the self-awareness for which Paul D strives, and I believe ultimately attains. Perhaps it was that "Sixo went among trees at night. For dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open, he said. Privately, alone, he did it. None of the rest of them had seen him at it, but they could imagine it, and the picture they pictured made them eager to laugh at him--in daylight, that is, when it was safe" (Beloved 25). The awe that Sixo inspires is not restricted to the slaves on Sweet Home, although in them it is mixed with love and kinship whereas Sixo's internal power provokes fear and hatred in the white men who encounter him.

In fact, it is this awe turned to fear that is ultimately Sixo's death sentence. After his recapture, schoolteacher initially wants Sixo returned alive until he begins to sing and battle. Then schoolteacher changes his mind saying "'This one will never be suitable.' The song must have convinced him" (Beloved 226). While this transpires, Paul D is tied to a tree and must witness what he believes to be the actions of a true man, and later

thinks that "he should have sung along" (Beloved 227). Paul D condemns himself for not being able to laugh like Sixo laughed when they lit a fire at his feet, for not being able to stare at the gun with defiance as Sixo had, for not having sired the child that would have allowed him to call out "Seven-O! Seven-O!" as his dying words. To all of these things Paul D must admit that he falls short and in his misery of not having behaved like the valiant, honorable Halle nor the brave, wild Sixo he then meets with his third condemnation of his manhood: a rooster named Mister.

Retelling his pain to Sethe, he explains that it was seeing Mister free while he walked by shackled, collared, with a bit in his mouth that ruined him beyond repair. The problem was that Paul D believed that the rooster felt the superiority of his position. Paul D explains:

He sat right there on the tub looking at me. I swear he smiled. . . Mister, he looked so . . . free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. Son of a bitch couldn't even get out the shell by hisself but he was still king and I was . . . Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. (Beloved 73)

In his retelling of these events, it is clear that Paul D's self-development is not yet complete. He did not as yet realize that one does not need to be "allowed to be" what one is. One just is. Paul D is only able to claim himself after he jeopardizes his relationship with Sethe and rediscovers the feelings long buried within. This self-knowledge comes only after acknowledging his need to transgress the limitations of his concepts of manhood. Therefore, as he is dragged off in chains, he believed that he "was something else [than a man] and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (Beloved 73).

Paul D imprisoned in Alfred, Georgia, "after trying to kill Brandywine, the man schoolteacher sold him to" (Beloved 107), begins to claim his manhood by surviving prison camp. He fights each night for his sanity, a struggle manifested by his hands. Hands over which he would lose control each night in his underground cell, hands which became his again as he pounded boulders into ash. Interestingly, the inability to control one's hands is also experienced by Shadrack in Sula. He, like Paul D, suffers from a lack of self-definition. Shadrack's case is so severe that he never attains a developed self-awareness. Shadrack, however, does undergo some change and it can be argued that his rejection of masculine definitions, his self-imposed isolation, and his "National Suicide Day" are acts of autonomy generated by

his rejection of behavior norms. For Paul D, the "trembling was fixed by the time he knew it was there" (Beloved 107) and only ended after he escaped from the prison.

At the prison, Paul D is linked to forty-five other men bound together with a chain "threaded through forty-six loops of the best hand-forged iron in Georgia" (Beloved 109). Isolated each evening in a subterranean cell box, Paul D suffers a penalty that Foucault describes: "Not only must the penalty be individual, but it must also be individualizing" (Foucault 236). Therefore, when floods come, these chain-gang men are locked in their separate boxes underground. Yet, although the water is rising and the weight of the mud on top of the boxes causes the roofs to bend, they are "not screaming although some of them must have fought like the devil not to" (Beloved 110). Paul D does not scream as the mud creeps up to his neck and he plunged "down through the mud under the bars, blind, groping" (Beloved 110). This moment and the ensuing time Paul D is dependent upon the other men as they are upon him because tied together it is clear that "a man could risk his own life, but not his brother's" (Beloved 109). So, through this dependency and his own dependability, Paul D begins to fulfill his newly developing conception of manhood. These men make it to freedom through the aid of the American Indians they encounter during the storm.

The linked men encounter a Cherokee tribe that helps

them break the chain so that the prisoners may separately go on to search for freedom. The tribes people were "decimated but stubborn, they were among those who chose a fugitive life rather than Oklahoma. The illness that swept them now was reminiscent of the one that had killed half their number two hundred years earlier" (Beloved 111). With these people Paul D stays until "alone, the last man with buffalo hair among the ailing Cherokee, Paul D finally woke up and, admitting his ignorance, asked how he might get North. Free North" (Beloved 112). By allowing himself to garner the aid of the Cherokee, Paul D makes two more steps towards development. He exposes his vulnerability, a dependency his earlier view of masculinity prevented him from admitting, and he learns the way to freedom. And so he takes the advice to "follow the tree flowers" and begins his blooming run North (Beloved 112). This run aids his claim to manhood and he starts to feel his own power because "walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a hammer in chains" (Beloved 41).

Having learned that his path to self-knowledge is not represented by the masculinity embodied by Sixo or Halle, and not defined by Garner or schoolteacher, Paul D breaks the various restrictions these alternate images of masculinity demanded. However, many years later, when he arrives at Sethe's home he is still flawed by his inability

to appreciate his full value and still believes that it is "just as well . . . [to keep] that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut. He would not pry it loose now in front of this sweet sturdy woman, for if she got a whiff of the contents it would shame him. And it would hurt her to know that there was no red heart bright as Mister's comb beating in him" (Beloved 73).

Although incapable of offering Sethe his whole self, he soothes her because by "not even trying, he had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the woman cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could. There was something blessed in his manner" (Beloved 17). Barbara Schapiro suggests that "for Morrison, the maternal nurturing quality is a form of love that is not restricted by gender; this view expands the possibilities, and is a liberation factor, for her characters" (204). This added quality of Paul D's developing sense of self enables him, on his first day back with Sethe, to share portions of his newfound masculinity:

Behind her, bending down, his body an arc of kindness, he held her breasts in the palms of his hands. He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches. Tracing his fingers to the hooks of her dress, he knew without

seeing them or hearing any sigh that the tears were coming fast. And when the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display, he could think but not say, "Aw, Lord, girl." And he would have no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years. What she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands. (Beloved 18)

This scene, the one I believe to be the most beautiful in Morrison's writing to date, has serious thematic importance. Not only is this the point when Sethe can momentarily relinquish the responsibility of her breasts, and the mother-love they signify, but Paul D can demonstrate his dependability and his newly codified sense of masculinity. And even though Sethe later wonders if "maybe a man was nothing but a man, which is what Baby Suggs always said. They encouraged you to put some of your weight in their hands and soon as you felt how light and lovely that was, they studied your scars and tribulations, after which they did what he had done: ran her children out and tore up the house" (Beloved 23), this moment demonstrates the two lovers' reconstruction of their independent selves.

Not long after this moment Beloved makes her appearance in corporal form. Sethe becomes consumed in her attempts to redress her past infanticide, and Paul D becomes mired in a strange yet compelling sexual relationship with Beloved that removes the last vestiges of his self-protection. It is at this point that Paul D learns of Sethe's murderous love and he retreats in disgust and fear.

This rupture with Sethe culminates with Paul D hearing her tale then judging her according to principles which do not apply. He states "you got two feet, Sethe, not four" (Beloved 165), comparing her to the animal whose characteristics schoolteacher had lined up in columns in his student/nephew's notebooks. This is a slip back to Paul D's earlier self when he compared himself to a rooster. He wonders "what made him say it . . . [and] how fast he had moved from his shame to hers. From his cold-house secret straight to her too-thick love" (Beloved 165). Schapiro suggests that "like all of the other black characters in the novel, he must work out of a condition of psychic fragmentation--his self-hood has been severely impaired, his status as a human subject denied by the slave culture" (205). Before Paul D has fully integrated the competing aspects of his burgeoning sense of self, he temporarily falls into his older patterns which suggest absolute definitions of right and wrong, of human and animal, of masculinity and weakness. Paul D does not understand that,

as Anne Goldman suggests, Sethe's choice is an act and "a demonstration of this 'too thick love,' it asserts Sethe as a subject who insists on exercising the right to desire her own daughter, despite the measures of the slaveholder to deny this authority" (319).

This ties into what Susan Babbitt explains as his "reasons for thinking that 'used-to-be-slaves' should love small [because] there is always the risk that what is loved will be taken away, and one has to be able to continue loving" (8). She goes on to state that "his judgment reflects a desire to fulfill personal ends and interests, as well as an informed awareness of what the likely consequences will be of certain kinds of actions and commitments. Sethe's reasoning about her own situation is not a refutation of Paul D's premises" (Babbitt 8). Sethe's actions are in fact a confirmation of his fears of a "too-thick love" which he actively resists. Ashraf Rushdy notes that "Paul D understands only that Sethe murdered Beloved; he suggests that it was because her love was 'too thick.' It will take him the rest of the novel to understand that for Sethe 'Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all' (164)" (589). But Paul D does come to understand this. Only when he is able to submit to a similar type of love offered first sexually by Beloved and then both physically and emotionally by Sethe, can he thereby break from his earlier limitations. Understanding all this, Paul

D returns to Sethe and claims autonomy.

Recalling Paul D's encounter with Mister, it is important to note that this scene not only indicates the physical pain of slavery, and the emotional suffering tied to chains and collars, but most importantly, the erosion of personal identity that is part of slavery. Paul D retells his perspective time and time again. He explains how he lost not only his view of himself as a man but his view of himself as a human. Schapiro elaborates this idea suggesting that "psychic death, as the novel makes clear, involves the denial of one's being as a human subject" (195). Similarly, the time spent in Alfred, Georgia is equally problematic because he is both a slave and a criminal. Locked in his small box, he suffers excruciatingly. His pain is principally linked to his inability to control his own hands--a symbolic example of his actual situation where he is not permitted ownership of his body. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul D accuses Sethe of animalistic behavior because it is the very thing he fears about himself.

What frightens Paul D, beyond the bloody reality of her act, is what this act symbolizes. He thinks that "more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed" (BeLoved 164). Babbitt explains that "what Sethe claimed, and what was startling, even to Stamp Paid and Paul D, was that she was a full-human being. But she is only able to

make this claim because of what she has done, and indeed of what she has become" (11). This claim to humanity is frightening to Paul D because his self-identity is frail and constantly wavering. Yet, by acknowledging Sethe's right to behave transgressively--although not condoning her behavior--Paul D signals his own ability to act autonomously.

Schapiro states that because "Paul D returns to Sethe and her fearful, murderous love" they "are able to salvage out of the wreckage a bolstering faith in both self and other" (207). Ultimately, Paul D's tender words to Sethe "You your own best thing" (Beloved 273) become both the sign and the signifier of his own development. As she queries "Me? Me?," echoes of his earlier self-doubt resonate. And in the words "you are" can be heard the stronger sentiment, echoing Descartes' proof of existence, "I am."

Attaining this confirmed sense of self is a slow and arduous task for Paul D because of the various conflicting images of masculinity offered him throughout his life. And much like the self-named Stamp Paid, who believed he had seen enough misery in his difficult life to decide whatever bill he owed had been covered in full, Paul D realizes that his struggles will continue. However, the sense that Paul D had firmly placed himself on the scale and judged himself up to the mark is clear. The struggle for self-definition against and within the multiple codes of masculinity represented by Paul D's development are similarly battled in

Morrison's other novels. In Song of Solomon, as in Beloved, the leading male character must transgress the internal and external limitations to attain liberation and self-definition.

Section II: "Three Styles of Masculinity in Song of Solomon"

In order to avoid replication of themes presented in Chapter One of this dissertation, I shall focus upon the figure of Milkman Dead and his struggle to define himself according to masculine ideals presented in Song of Solomon. James Riemer suggests that the "aim of men's studies approach to american literature is re-vision: a revision of the way we read literature and a revision of the way we perceive men and manly ideals. It is a revision that seeks to understand how culturally defined ideals of manhood have shaped the lives of men, frequently limiting their growth or frustrating their basic needs" (298). In Song of Solomon, unlike Beloved, the presence of the dominant American cultural codes have a strong impact upon the definitions of masculinity in the segregated African American culture presented. The need for economic success, the possession of property, and/or violent power are presented as part of the masculine codes pursued by the men in this novel.

By limiting myself to the development of Milkman, yet making use of the characters of his father, Macon Dead, and Guitar, I shall be able to explore the varying stages of progress Milkman makes toward self unity, much like the movements of Paul D in Beloved. However, it must be acknowledged that many of Milkman's struggles for self-definition as a man are influenced by his race and class.

Consequently, some of his issues reflect the need to develop a unified self by rupturing the codes of white masculinity.

Therefore, I delve into the psychological development of Milkman and his expressed feelings about fulfilling the masculine roles presented to him. It is significant to note that Milkman's need to transgress these limitations is more palpable than the other male characters found in Song of Solomon. In fact, I would argue that the other men in this novel completely adhere to the structures defining their style of masculinity. Milkman's success is more definite than other representations of men found in Morrison's overall corpus of work, which is perhaps why this novel has been well received by the reading public that decries the lack of positive black male characters in black female literature. Elaine Showalter states that "Black male writers have protested against the representation of black men in the fiction of Afro-American woman novelists" (169). And Deborah McDowell discusses this same problem, citing Mel Watkins complaint "that in the great majority of their novels, black women indicate that 'sexism is more oppressive than racism'. In these works, black males are portrayed in an 'unflinchingly candid and often negative manner,' almost without exception, 'thieves, sadists, rapists, and ne'er-dowells.' In choosing Black men as a target . . . Watkins continues 'these writers have set themselves outside a

tradition, devoted to establishing humane, positive images of Blacks'" (36). As a counterbalance to this criticism, I believe that in Song of Solomon Morrison develops three male characters that are complicated and at points condemnable, yet are also sympathetic and understandable and are, therefore, interesting explorations masculinity.

As in the previous section, I argue that masculinity is defined primarily by the possession of power. In Song of Solomon, male power is embodied by American cultural ideals of economic, physical/sexual, or violent control, whereas in Beloved the restrictions governing the slaves force the men to codify masculinity in a different way than the systems approached in this novel. Philip Harper, in Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity, states that "insofar as black identity thus depends upon identification specifically as man, . . . then blackness will partake of the very uncertainty, tentativeness, and burden of proof that we have seen to characterize conventional masculinity" (40). It is these African American and American cultural ideals of masculinity that undermine the male characters' ability to develop independent autonomous identities. It is this uncertainty that Milkman must rectify by transgressing the external limitations and developing his own concept of masculinity.

Because Song of Solomon is set in the mid-twentieth century, the male characters grapple with the cultural

implications of economics, education, and violence as a means to assert masculine ideals. As representatives of these ideals, the first two male characters addressed are polar opposites: Macon Dead, the successful businessman who defines his masculinity through his money and his ability to terrorize his wife, and Guitar Bains, who finds male power by joining The Seven Days, a racist, murderous group. Between these two men, there is Milkman. David Cowart sees that Milkman must remove himself from the competing ideologies of Macon and Guitar. He suggests that Milkman "must escape the nets that would make him morally and spiritually earthbound. His nets include his own selfishness, for which all too often the women around him must pay (Hagar, First Corinthians, Pilate); the narrow bourgeois materialism of his benighted father; and the self-defeating violence and machismo of black militancy" (9). Milkman must break from the limitations enforced through the definition of masculinity as economic and physical power.

It is Milkman who commands focus in the novel, and in this chapter, not only because he is the character with whom the reader becomes most intimate but also because Milkman struggles throughout the novel to define himself within the context offered him. I think the ultimate commentary is that Milkman must both figuratively and literally leap outside these parameters to find his own concept of masculinity. Michael Awkward, sighting Lee, states that

Morrison's novel includes "what is apparently a traditional heroic male act of archeology--its protagonist Milkman Dead's 'archetypal search for self and for transcendence' reveals her complex inscription of ideology, or, more accurate [Sic], ideologies: the afrocentric and feminist politics that inform Song of Solomon" (137). Therefore, Milkman's transcendence and his leap are inspired by the brief accounts about his paternal grandfather which provide an alternate definition of masculinity and dignity from those represented by Macon and Guitar.

Morrison develops the community in Song of Solomon, split as it is along economic lines. The Dead family is described on both sides of this divide, as Philip Page states, "the extended Dead family seems at first irrevocably split between the two households in their two opposing parts of town" (85). With Milkman and his immediate family on the affluent side and his cousin, Hagar, and her family on the other, the tensions unique to this community emerge clearly. Milkman is like Jade in Tar Baby, because Milkman straddles both worlds (or more cynically, because he can not make an adult decision between his options), he is the character who struggles most actively to define himself. However, it is interesting to note that Page parallels this structure to "the contrasts between the MacTeer and Breedlove households in The Bluest Eye and the Peace and Wright households in Sula (Barthold 180)" (85). Although the economic and social

divisions are applicable to these two novels, I find the strenuous struggle for self-identification more notably linked between Jade and Milkman.

Significantly, Milkman fights to define his position within the various contexts offered to him by his community and also by the external systems represented by his father and grandfather's allegiance to white standards. Jean S. Phinney states that "the importance and centrality of ethnic identity are strongly associated with one's situation and experiences within society. For member of groups of color, the significance of their groups membership may lie in part in the struggle to gain equality, recognition, and acceptance within a predominantly White society" (923). This aspect of identity is clearly a struggle for both Macon Dead and Dr. Foster, and I contend that through their legacy Milkman must grapple with his self-identified masculinity through and against their examples.

Milkman's maternal grandfather, Dr. Foster, is a problematic character for both Milkman and the reader because so little is known about him first hand. Nonetheless, when comparing Dr. Foster to the first Macon Dead, his paternal grandfather, the differences between their fulfillment of masculine ideals has important influences upon Milkman. The original Macon Dead was a "man's man." He fulfilled an early definition of American manhood: Michael Kimmel explains that "nineteenth century,

American manhood was rooted in landownership (the Genteel Patriarch) or in the self-possession of the independent artisan, shopkeeper, or farmer (the Heroic Artisan)" (9). Macon Dead I worked in his own fields, and he had enough personal integrity to stand up to the whites who tried and succeeded to take that land. Although the wisdom of his resistance can surely be questioned, because these whites did "shoot him five feet into the air," the point is that Macon Dead I embodied the style of manhood that allowed him to love his wife, to befriend his children, and to share himself and his good spirit.

Dr. Foster, on the other hand, embodied the role of highly educated, successful doctor at a time when blacks were extremely oppressed. Yet, he is condemned because of his reliance and replication of white structures and class distinctions. These things are what lead to his problems with his daughter's incestuous attentions, and perhaps his own reliance on ether. The work of Dr. Foster is presented by Macon as impure--tainted with incest, unclean because he delivers his own grandchildren,--whereas the work of Macon is hard back-breaking work, pure in its sweat and strength. The relationship between Dr. Foster and Ruth is mixed in with sexuality and becomes an unnatural, unholy correspondence after death, whereas Macon I's love for Pilate, like his love for his son Macon, is filled with beauty and respect and his afterdeath relationship is one of

guidance and nurturance.

The contrast between the deaths of these two grandfathers is significant. Macon I is killed for his principles, shot in his prime, bloodied and brutalized--but he remained a strong black man completely assured of his own worth. In contrast, Dr. Foster allowed his life to ebb away through the degenerating influence of too much ether and an unhealthy life style. He died "puffed-up and white" emblematic of his decay, even his virility is known to have been removed by the use of ether. The final condemnation of Dr. Foster, as his devoted daughter admits, was that "he was not a good man" (Song 124).

What then is the impact of these two images on Milkman? Clearly, the image of Macon Dead I is the model he should, and eventually does, follow but in order to even understand the alternate images of masculinity embodied by his grandfathers, Milkman must come to understand the more immediate influences on his life represented by his own father and, his friend, Guitar.

Prior to his development of a unified self, which comes at the very close of the novel, Milkman must transgress the codes dictating proper masculine behavior of several systems. In the realm controlled by his father, Milkman fails to fulfill the masculine ideal of economic power. At first, Milkman does not openly reject his father's ideals, and therefore his transgression of this system does not

grant him independence. In fact, he utilizes his position as his father's emissary to fulfill his own aims which at that point are linked to Guitar's image of masculinity--of carousing, womanizing, and violent behavior. Milkman is a shaky character because of his lack of forthrightness. By fluctuating between his father and Guitar's structures, Milkman remains weak and ineffectual, a sham operator who irritates both male figures without actively confronting them at this point. He fulfills what R. W. Connell highlights as "Sartre's treatment of 'bad faith,' situations where people refuse responsibility for what they do and claim that their decisions are made for them by external forces" () This is precisely what Milkman does at this point in his development. David Cowart suggests that "under the influence of his avaricious father and the embittered Guitar, Milkman flirts with becoming a peacock like the one he and Guitar see as gaudily winged creature incapable of sustained flight" (94). This idea of false confidence, of support of superficial codes of masculinity rather than individual development of autonomy, can be applied to various men in Tar Baby.

Milkman collects the rents in his father's domain which allows him time and excuse to be in Hagar and Pilate's part of town. This job also allows him to be with Guitar and to hang out at the barber shop and learn about the Seven Days. However, Milkman does not forgo his family's vacations to

Honeré. Guitar in fact holds this against him, protesting "I know you . . . You got your high-tone friends and your picnics on Honeré Island (Song 103). Then Guitar condemns Milkman as less than a man, saying to him that "if things ever got tough, you'd melt" (Song 104). A slowly developing divide between the two friends becomes more apparent. Much later Milkman complains "I'm tired of being criticized by you. I know we don't see eye to eye on a lot of things. I know you think I'm lazy--not serious, you say--but if we're friends . . ." (Song 153). It is at this point that Guitar tells Milkman about the Seven Days, a society that "when a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by *their* law and *their* courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner" (Song 155). With this information and Milkman's reaction to it, the rift becomes an acknowledged and definite chasm.

Because Guitar's claim to manhood is no longer limited to the brawls of Feather's Pool Hall or the conquests of young women, but has now become part of a vigilante mentality, Milkman does not pretend to emulate Guitar. Milkman relinquishes connection to "lower-class black man [who] frequently adopt a compulsive masculinity alternative in order to mitigate low self-esteem and negative feelings that emerge from their inability to enact traditional masculine roles" (Franklin, in Brod 156). Milkman has moved

away from the false masculinity of Guitar and his compatriots at the barber shop. Peter A. Lupsha states that "to create a unique self is a difficult task, a luxury few have the wit or leisure even to attempt. Most of us are thus content to be molded by a role as defined by culture" (144). This is Guitar's situation. Because he does not look outside of the oppositional modes of manhood offered to him, that of Macon's assimilation or that of the Seven Days's rebellion, Guitar does not break from the norms of his culture. He adheres to the vigilante mentality offered by the Seven Days and abdicates his self-will to their cause. Whereas Milkman's rejection of the Seven Days is the first step in his burgeoning self-awareness.

It is not the morality of Milkman's choice that is significant, but instead the transgression of Guitar's codes which is the key to Milkman's development. By distancing himself from the Seven Days, or more accurately, by allowing Guitar to distance himself, Milkman's first move toward autonomy takes shape. The reprisal for this move comes later on in the novel, and like the other characters I have discussed in this fashion, payment for this move toward selfhood has lethal consequences.

The second shift in Milkman's self-awareness comes when he confronts his father; however this shift is also only a fledgling move towards self-possession. Having intervened on his mother's behalf, Milkman hits Macon: "Milkman had

yanked him by the back of his coat collar, up out of his chair, and knocked him into the radiator" and then screamed "You touch her again, one more time, and I'll kill you" (Song 67). Although this moment seems like a strong move on Milkman's part, a fulfillment of an Oedipal struggle, it is in actuality a weak move, as his sister Magdalene later informs him. The reason this transgressive move does not ennoble Milkman is that he is unable or unwilling to take blame. When "infinite possibilities and enormous responsibilities stretched out before him, . . . he was not prepared to take advantage of the former, or accept the burden of the latter" (Song 68). Milkman's inability to accept the ramifications of his actions is augmented when he travels to the South.

Significantly, Milkman also fails to fulfill his mother's concept of the masculine ideal. He completely rejects her pressures to pursue a medical career. He dismisses her desire with the admonishment that no sick person would want help from "Doctor Dead." The last name Dead becomes an old joke between Milkman and Guitar; unfortunately at the end of the novel it becomes an earnest threat. Rejection of the name Doctor Dead is a rejection of Ruth and her ideals of manhood. Although her husband Macon does not meet her ideal, Ruth hoped that her son would emulate her father, Doctor Foster. Milkman actively tries to break from this connection.

Following Ruth to the graveyard where she visits her long dead father, Milkman muses that "she was a silly, selfish, queer, faintly obscene woman. Again he felt abused. Why couldn't anybody in his whole family just be normal?" (Song 123). Later, when he complains that she had nursed him until he was "too old," Ruth states, "I also prayed for you. Every single night and every single day. On my knees. Now you tell me. What harm did I do you on my knees?" (Song 126). Milkman does not answer this question. In fact Milkman's perceptions about his parents are very conflicted. He becomes confused with alternate images and opposing recounts of the same events. Although interesting, space does not allow me to delve into the psychological ramifications of these aspects of Milkman's character development. What is significant to this work is that Milkman becomes active in his search for himself outside of the definitions offered by both his mother and father.

Ruth's role as mother is one structure that Milkman utilizes to define his own masculinity. Eva Feder Kittay suggests that the use of the mother figure is a common trope which men use to define themselves:

it is the initial position of Mother as Other that makes Woman a particularly suitable vehicle to mediate later (re)definitions of oneself and one's connections to the world. Because man's first and most significant attempt to define

himself and to establish his relationships arises out of his experience with a woman, women serve, metaphorically, to represent those activities and domains in which man will redefine himself and establish new associations in a world which expands for him as he matures and gains knowledge.

(271)

Therefore, Milkman's rejection of his mother is one of the ways that he mis-uses the women around him to establish his own sense of masculinity. Unfortunately, at this point his rejection of Ruth supports an externally defined code of masculinity.

In this section tracing his development, Milkman's initial transgressions of masculine ideals discloses them to be really more failures than strides toward autonomy. Just as he lacks proper drives to accommodate the roles established by his parents, he falls short of the expectations of masculinity held by Guitar. According to these rules of masculinity, Guitar knows that Macon's way is a failure because Macon Dead overly adheres to cultural definitions of white business practices.

It is important to be reminded that, as Barbara Rigney suggests, "Guitar serves mostly as a foil for Milkman, and perhaps Melvin Dixon is correct in his observation that Guitar's very name characterizes, not latent musical ability, but his role as 'instrumental in Milkman's

development of character and cultural awareness'" (51). This is why the changes in their relationship are significant. The shifting away from Guitar symbolized Milkman's developing identity and autonomy.

From early in the novel, to Guitar's later understandings of manhood developed at Feather's Pool Hall, it is clear he views Milkman as less than a man. What is puzzling is the development of their friendship--perhaps Guitar uses Milkman's weakness for self-aggrandizement, making himself feel stronger, more masculine in contrast to the undeveloped Milkman. Either way, Milkman vacillates between the oppositional views of manhood offered by Macon and Guitar, remaining ineffectual and childish, until he reaches the South.

In discussing Guitar, Philip Page suggests that "Guitar's life is determined by the unexercised ghosts of his parents: The callous response of his father's employer to his father's grisly death motivates Guitar's hatred of whites, and his mother's sycophantic imitation of Aunt Jemima precipitates his mistrust of women" (86). This reading of Guitar is slightly heavy handed; however, it is this very same type of Aunt Jemima-ing that unravels Guitar's relationship to Pilate and signifies the impending complete rupture in Guitar's link with Milkman. At the Police station, where both Milkman and Guitar have been brought after stealing what they thought was Pilate's gold,

both Pilate and Macon Dead arrive to rescue the men. Macon uses his money and his influence to get the men out.

Henry Louis Gates presents an interesting commentary on the problematic definition of black masculinity through his interview with Colin Powell. Powell, in discussing his acceptance as both republican and a national symbol states, one, "I don't bring any stereotypes or threatening visage to their presence. Some black people do. Two, I can overcome any stereotypes or reservations they have, because I perform well. Third thing is, *I ain't that black* [italics original]. . . I speak reasonably well, like a white person'" (Thirteen 84). Linking this representation of masculinity to the men in Song of Solomon, it is clear Macon wishes he had status such as Powell's, after all he performs well and is seen by some as "like a white person," but he is *that black* and he doesn't have Powell's genuine power. Consequently, at the police station, Macon must rely on his money--his only power--to have Milkman released. Guitar, on the other hand, with his cat eyes and palpable hatred, is one of the black people who presents a "threatening visage." Macon is acutely aware of this and disapproves of his son's connection to Guitar. Appropriately, it is Pilate who makes sure that both men are released.

Pilate's demeanor and storytelling secure their liberation. Not only does Pilate absolve them of guilt, saying that the theft was a joke rather than robbery, she

performs a "Butterfly McQueen" act for the entertainment of the station house. Milkman perceives this gesture as a symbol of Pilate's strong love and even stronger command of herself, whereas Guitar is disgusted by her behavior, seeing her as a weak woman and an embarrassment. Yet Milkman, too, remembers the night with shame, "shame at seeing his father--with an accommodating 'we all understand how it is' smile--buckle before the policemen. But nothing was like the shame he felt as he watched and listened to Pilate. Not just her Aunt Jemima act, but the fact that she was both adept at it and willing to do it--for him" (Song 209). Milkman's shame and guilt are self-directed.

In contrast to Milkman's self-recriminations, Guitar's response to Pilate is filled with vitriol, stating that "she slipped into those Jemima shoes cause they fit" (Song 224). He goes on to condemn Macon saying he "behaves like a white man, thinks like a white man" (Song 224). When Guitar asks how Macon "after losing everything his own father worked for to some crackers, after seeing his father shot down by them, how can he keep his knees bent? Why does he love them so? And Pilate. She's worse . . . Now is that voluntary slavery or not?" (Song 224). As a side note, this reference to voluntary slavery exemplifies my discussions about Macon and other Morrison character's support of the white system undertaken in Chapter I. Returning to the theme at hand, the difference between their perceptions signifies the rapid

change in their relationship, and Milkman's move away from Guitar's representation of masculinity. Cowart suggests that "Morrison exploits the theme of the Doppelganger or psychological double" stating that:

Guitar represents the Jungian shadow of Milkman's developing consciousness--the part of the self that one most dreads, least wishes to admit--yet the part with which one must come to terms in the interest of psychological wholeness.

Symbolically, Milkman represents a black middle class that must encounter the denied or sublimated rage embodied in Guitar. If the rage is not faced, it will, like other forms of the repressed, reassert itself in various pathologies of consciousness, perhaps even take over and dictate behavior that will result in self-destruction.

(97)

Guitar's rage, which I do not think is denied, does operate as a counterpoint to Milkman's development of an expansive understanding of himself and his world.

No longer is Guitar Milkman's saving angel, saving him from the boys that beat him up, saving him from the isolation of his family, saving him from his own ignorance as a twelve year old. Guitar's history as protector is long, in fact he was instrumental in insuring Milkman's healthy birth. As a little boy, Guitar was sent to the

emergency room--after correcting the Nurse's spelling--to get help for Ruth Dead's imminent labor. Later, as twenty-year-olds, they share the fun of wine, women, and song, but a chasm develops. Criticism and chaffing occurs because they emulate different types of men and embody competing views of a masculine ideal. Guitar turns to violence, and Milkman begins to follow his father's example. Rigney states that "Milkman's 'self'-analysis is juxtaposed, significantly, to the entrance of his father, who surely represents for Morrison and exaggerated and clearly parodic version of patriarchal inscriptions" (36). In contrast, Guitar sees himself as a real man, and views Milkman as a spoiled baby boy. And Guitar's role of protector changes to that of competitor, then enemy and possibly murderer.

Mason notes that "Morrison establishes Guitar as superficially opposite--his violent radicalism contrasting with Macon's capitulation to white middle-class values. But this explicit conflict of political values makes a greater informing similarity. Both characters remain infected by a nearly single-mindedly rigid pursuit of the informing goals of their fictions--property and revenge" (572). Proposing that Guitar, in contrast to Macon, 'finds himself subject to the dictates of the same white violence he claims to abhor and has pledged himself to combat. The irony of the Days' mode of revenge, that the violence of whites against blacks is returned to whites in kind, in fact turns back against

the Days in an important reversal." Mason explains his meaning by highlighting that "despite their avowed stand against passivity, in a perverse way the Days remain dependent on the actions of whites" (572). Cynthia Davis concurs with this reading, submitting that "'the Days,' who take revenge for white violence, are also reactive, still achieving secondhand identity and initiative" (326). Morrison's creation of this type of behavior reflects Clyde Franklin belief that "the lower the socioeconomic status, the greater the influence of the black man's peer group on the lives of black men" (in Brod 160). Consequently, Guitar's very acts of rebellion confirm his adherence to a secondary/replacement set of standards that deny him self-knowledge and autonomy.

The different ways that Guitar and Milkman react to Pilate is far removed from their childhood responses to Pilate: Milkman is embarrassed that he was willing "to knock down an old black lady who had cooked him his first perfect egg," (Song 209) whereas Guitar wishes they had knocked her down and knocked her out. Guitar thinks she is a sham, while Milkman's comes to understand that Pilate's goodness to him runs the gamut of his entire life, from before his conception to saving his life at the end of the novel. Beyond giving Milkman his first perfect egg, Pilate becomes a link to the past.

Pilate connects him to his unmet grandmother by

describing Sing's blue bonnet ribbon which matches the sky. Interestingly, it may be the same color as the ribbons in Ruth's corset, which Macon found more erotic than the women held within. Nonetheless, through Pilate, Milkman gains a view of Africa and his heritage. Pilate represents the earth, magic, and possibility. But above all Pilate is the connection to flight. She links him to the Africans who flew to freedom and home, and she teaches him to "fly without even leaving the ground." Her teachings are carried with Milkman on his trip and aid him through his trials.

With this wisdom, in the South, Milkman develops a sense of his unique masculine self, thinking that "here he had stopped evading things, sliding through, over, and around difficulties. Before he had taken risks only with Guitar. Now he took them alone" (Song 271). Page explains that Milkman is "bored with his father's assimilationist and material version of black capitalism, he is disgusted with his mother's necromatic fantasies, and he has no patience for Guitar's political obsession with racial injustice" (93). Adding Ruth and Pilate to the mix, Page goes on to assert that "all five characters place claims on him to fulfill their own unfulfilled lives, and Milkman is vulnerable to their reification of him because he lacks the will to examine himself and his life" (93). Although I do support these assertions, I take exception to Pilate's representation.

I believe it is more than Pilate's "natural wisdom and openness" (Page 93) that influences Milkman. It is through her that Milkman can become strong and overthrow the competing concepts of masculinity thrust upon him. And, in fact Page himself expounds upon Pilate:

as Milkman's spiritual guide, his griot, she models for Milkman the creation of self that is both within and without the community, she precedes him in her physical journey and her symbolic journey toward love and harmony, and she teaches him the values of a spiritual, Afrocentric, nature-centered, nonlinear perspective as opposed to Macon's material one" (92).

Therefore it is with Pilate's influence that in the South, Milkman sheds pretenses of manhood and begins to develop an accurate view of himself and his personal shortcomings, much in the way Paul D changes on his move North.

The reason these two men must physically move in opposite directions to acquire complete command of themselves is that each man must understand the half of himself separated by his lack of experience on the other side of the Mason Dixon line. Paul D must run North to encounter his free self and his future, and Milkman must hunt South to find his African self and learn his past. Significantly, it is only after each of these men travel and

make amends for their grievances against women, their personal weaknesses, and their adherence to other people's images of masculinity that these men can attain peace.

Milkman undertakes the trip south to find the gold that Macon and Pilate left in a cave in their home town of Shalimar. Initially, it is a way to escape from his father's clutches, which is a weak way to obtain independence. He is running from his life and responsibilities rather than running to it. He wants to get away from "Lena's anger, Corinthians' loose and uncombed hair, matching her slack lips, Ruth's stepped-up surveillance, his father's bottomless greed, Hagar's hollow eyes" (Song 221). Milkman runs because he felt "he did not know whether he deserved any of that, but he knew he was fed up and he knew he had to leave quickly" (Song 221).

Striking a bargain with his father, that if he returns with the gold he will be allowed to leave the family business, Milkman also strikes a deal with Guitar, promising half of the gold to support the actions of the Seven Days. Milkman is buying his safety, protecting himself from the wrath of the vigilantes, and buying his freedom--two things he is unable to secure for himself because of his hesitant and wavering ways.

It is only in the South that Milkman realizes he is a terrible son to both his father and his mother and an even worse brother. In Kownen's interview, Morrison states that

the Milkman character had to be a man because "men have more to learn in certain areas than women do . . . what I wanted was a character who had everything to learn, who would start from zero, and had no reason to learn anything, because he's comfortable, he doesn't need money, he's just flabby and pampered" (75).

Milkman is just that, flabby and pampered, so his development is profound. He reminisces about his argument with Magdalene when she extols him, shouting "our girlhood was spent like a found nickel on you. . . And to this day, you have never asked one of us if we were tired, or sad, or wanted a cup of coffee. You've never picked up anything heavier than your own feet, or solved a problem harder than fourth-grade arithmetic. Where do you get the right to decide our loves?" (Song 215). Magdalene highlights Milkman's earlier fight with Macon as a pretense, explaining: "I didn't go to college because of him. Because I was afraid of what he might do to Mama. You think because you hit him once that we all believe you were protecting her . . . It's a lie. You were taking over, letting us know you had the right to tell her and all of us what to do" (Song 215-6). In contrast to Magdalene's actions and sacrifices, Milkman's own earlier move is paltry.

The paltriness of Milkman is not dissimilar to the weakness of Cholly Breedlove and Valerian Street. In fact, as Rigney contends, "Morrison's men, too, are often

responsible for their own condition; they have surrendered masculinity deliberately and of their own free will, preferring the role of pampered infant (97). Rigney's reading of the above passages prompts her to emphasize that Milkman "has accepted the homage and deference of women whom he has, in turn, mistreated all his life, so locked is he in the prison of his male ego . . . although there is some regeneration for Milkman by the end of the novel . . . it is all ironically too late and too little" (97). It is of course too late for Hagar and Pilate, however, it is just in time for Milkman.

Milkman discerns that his treatment of Hagar was callousness combined with cruelty. He admits that "her eccentricities were no longer provocative and the stupefying ease with which he had gotten and stayed between her legs had changed from the great good fortune he'd considered it, to annoyance at her refusal to make him hustle for it" (Song 91). She had become tiresome:

the third beer. Not the first one, which the throat receives with almost tearful gratitude; not the second, that confirms and extends the pleasure of the first. But the third, the one you drink because it's there because it can't hurt, and because what difference does it make?" (Song 91).

These earlier thoughts of Hagar are disgusting, and yet Milkman could not fathom his own cruelty.

He had taken no responsibility for his influence over Hagar, deeming her crazy for her reactions. In fact he brutally said to her as she hung frozen above him with a cleaver, unable to kill him as she wished, "If you keep your hands just that way . . . and then bring them down straight, straight and fast, you can drive that knife right smack in your cunt" (Song 130). The power of his own statement was completely lost on Milkman. He is so blazé that he "patted her cheek and turned away from her wide, dark, pleading, hollow eyes" (Song 130). He had felt nothing, no pity, no remorse, no sorrow at the image of his lover of twelve years turned to stone.

It is only in the South, before he learns that she did in effect kill herself, that he rethinks himself, his words, and his actions. As he begins to take control of himself, he also takes responsibility. Regretting, he muses that "he had used her--her love, her craziness--and most of all he had used her skulking, bitter vengeance. It had made him a star, a celebrity in the Blood Bank; it told men and other women that he was one bad dude, that he had the power to drive a woman out of her mind" (Song 301). He realizes he had wanted people to know he had destroyed Hagar "not because she hated him . . . but because he had fucked her and she was driven wild by the absence of his magnificent joint" (Song 301). He acknowledges he had used Hagar time and time again "even the last time, he had used her. Used

her imminent arrival and feeble attempt at murder as an exercise of his will against hers--an ultimatum to the universe" (Song 301). On the hunt the threat of death is far more real, and Milkman is unable to scoff at it as he scoffs at Hagar.

As he moves further from the North his false concessions to masculine roles are stripped away and are replaced with new, real, experiences aiding him to define his own masculinity. Leading up to this development is the bottle/knife fight with a stranger, his participation in a hunt, his night with Sweet, and his confrontation with Guitar. These things help him discover the maleness old men describe his grandfather possessing. Milkman admits that he is not like his father and could not define masculinity through economics because "he couldn't get interested in money. No one had ever denied him any, so it had no exotic attraction" (Song 107). He cannot locate masculinity in politics because "barber-shop politics and Guitar's brand--put him to sleep" (Song 107). Consequently the fight with the stranger has a different influence on Milkman's masculinity other than that of violence, because violence is forever present in his life. It is the reality of it, the actual experience, rather than the contrived, controlled instances he experiences earlier, that means something to him. Before this Milkman's "rebellions, minor as they were, had all been in the company of, or shared with, Guitar"

(Song 181). Now, he is alone with no one to rescue him. Milkman feels this and likes the feeling of the autonomy it necessitates.

Milkman's unplanned search for self eventually leads him to maturity. Page explains that "Milkman's quest to Pennsylvania and Virginia is also a hunt, but a hunt in which the initial prey, the gold, becomes transformed into a search for himself and his ancestral origins" (95). As Willis indicates "if Milkman's present is a meaningless void of bourgeois alienation, the possibility of a past opens out to him like a great adventure. A quest for gold initiates Milkman's journey into the past--and into the self" (Gates, Black Literature, 270). He throws himself onto this path initially to find gold rather than God; however, after slow and frustrating experiences, Milkman begins to place himself in the continuum of the past. Milkman moves from "the preconventional conception of justice [which] is based on the needs of the self" through the "conventional judgement [which is] derived from an understanding of society" to a "postconventional or principled conception of justice where the good is formulated in universal terms" (Gilligan 556). In this way Milkman links himself to his past that is not only the immediate link to the Dead family, but an ever expanding past that encompasses all the Dead and eventually includes the larger history of Africans and, ultimately, all man.

Awkward states that "In Song of Solomon, the empowered Afro-American's flight, celebrated in a blues song whose decoding catapults Milkman into self-conscious maturity, is a solitary one: in other words, his discovery of the means of transcendence--the liberating black word--is not shared with the tribe" (139). Although Milkman is without a co-traveler, I do not think that he is alone on his trip South. In fact, I believe that it is Milkman's independence--but not his aloneness--that allows a children's song--and not a blues song--to guide him. Blount worries that "if embracing normative masculinity requires a movement beyond, indeed, an escape from, the protection and life sustaining aspects symbolized by maternal umbilical cords and apron strings, and an achievement of an economic situation wherein the male provides domestic space and material sustenance for his dependents (including, 'his woman'), than black manhood generally is, like Plum [in Sula], in desperate trouble" (Blount 20). Alleviating this fear, Milkman's change in attitude is represented by the way he thinks about the people of Shalimar, his new found connection to others. No longer does he think, "Fuck 'em. My name's Macon; I'm already dead" and that the men of Shalimar "were some of the meanest unhung niggers in the world" (Song 271). These negative ruminations have been transformed through Pilate and the children's song of Sugarman. Page suggests that "the absence of gold in the cave outside Danville is crucial

in shifting Milkman from the moribund materialistic values he acquired from Macon to the spiritual ones modeled by Pilate" (92). It is this search for spiritual values, and for self definition, that Milkman struggles with, although in a very circuitous fashion. He had run not only from his mother, lover, sisters, and aunt to refashion himself, but finds he must reconceptualize his views instead. Carol Gilligan states that "the transition from selfishness to responsibility is a move toward social participation " (563). Milkman makes this transition by becoming linked to a tradition that defines masculinity far differently than the alternatives offered by his father or Guitar. Milkman begins to develop his own sense of masculinity which is comprised in part by taking responsibility and also taking genuine emotional and physical risks.

Indicative of his change in attitude is that after the experience of the hunt, Milkman roams the land "walking it like he belonged on it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil . . . And he did not limp" (281). The loss of the limp is highly significant and has been noted by various critics. House explains that "exhilarated by his new understanding, he then walks to meet the other hunters, and now rid of his arrogance and dependence on his father's values" (197). And Page draws attention to the presence of the limp stating that Milkman "develops a psychosomatic

'short' leg, which results from his disorientation and in turn makes him feel even more out of plum with the world" (97). I believe both these interpretations of the limp and its removal are valid; however, my personal take on it relates to his development of a coherent, acceptable self.

When Milkman initially notices that one of his legs is shorter than the other he develops a swagger to compensate, although "it wasn't a limp--not at all--just the suggestion of one, but it looked like an affected walk, the strut of a very young man trying to appear more sophisticated than he was. It bothered him and he acquired movements and habits to disguise what to him was a burning defect" (Song 62). His limp is imperceivable to the people around him, as are his internal flaws. He covers his insecurity about his physical viability with bravado, and this masking is replicated in his psychic and emotional worlds. When he returns from the hunt, having encountered and matched the threats of the cougar, the southern men, and Guitar--with varying and increasing directness--he is healed or at least healing. Whether the leg is a psychosomatic flaw or an actual mismatch is difficult to decipher from Morrison's portrayal of the cure. Either way, after he joins the other men and "held lamps over the carcass and groaned with pleasure at the size, the ferocity, the stillness" of the cat, he feels at one with the land. Awkward notes that Milkman's newly achieved knowledge of self and culture is

manifested dramatically during the course of an initiatory trial by fire in Shalimar, in which black male elders invite the bourgeois urbanite on a long, arduous hunting trek and then leave the novice hunter behind to fend for himself" (145). And he "does not limp."

It is important to note the development of Milkman's self-acceptance is not simply reliant upon his acceptance into this world of men, it is formed by his new found conceptualization based upon his transgression of previous beliefs about manhood. Georges Bataille, in Erotism: Death and Sensuality, has much to say about the links between threat and eroticism, something that I think Morrison taps into in Song of Solomon. The idea that "if the lover cannot possess the beloved he will sometimes think of killing her; often he would rather kill her than lose her. Or else he may wish to die himself" is certainly born out in the figure of Hagar. However, more importantly is that in discussing three different forms of eroticism, "physical, emotional and religious," Bataille states that "the concern is to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity" (15). This is in part what Milkman experiences after the hunt and ultimately at the end of the novel when he discovers his lineage. Milkman learns that "human self-consciousness can have different structures. The unreflective structure of being-for-itself is very different from self-knowledge with the structure of

being-for-others" (Connell 213). Having taken responsibility for his past actions, Milkman sheds his false consciousness and fulfill's what Blount refers to as 'being-for others.

At the end of the novel, Milkman has linked himself to the cosmos through his physical union with Sweet, his emotional connection to the men in the South as well as his paternal line, and religiously or mystical through the teaching of Pilate. In these moment with Sweet, Valerie Smith finds that "in the story of the bathing ritual communicates rebirth: Milkman discovers giving and sharing, new meaning in a loving relationship with a women" (22). In part, this care for Sweet signals his new development. Anthony C. Hilfer, in "Critical Indeterminacies in Toni Morrison's Fiction: An Introduction" emphasizes that Toni Morrison "asserts that 'there is something here which people miss. Milkman is willing to die at the end, and the person he is willing to die for is a woman'" (--). The woman he is willing to die for is Pilate.

Milkman constructs himself at first in opposition to the various roles offered to him, but then links to the Sugarman tale and the promise of flight. Milkman embodies Lupsha's thoughts: "Patterns are drawn not only from sense data and technological reality, but also from a desire to be, as well as an understanding of what has worked in the past. Thus we are not only cultural creations at best,

caricatures at worst; we are ongoing representations of myth as repeated and delimited by our society over time" (Lupsha 144). Milkman makes just this type of connection with his leap into the air, risking all in order to confront Guitar. He is no longer running from his fears, and he is no longer concerned with external pressures towards false consciousness. Instead he is deeply influenced by Pilate. Davis notes that "her own dying words are. ' I wish I'd a knowed more people. I would of loved 'em all. If I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more.' That free commitment to others is just what Milkman learns; it is no wonder that her answers by wishing for a mate like Pilate, saying 'There's got to be at least one more woman like you' (Song 340)" (339). I believe Milkman fulfills's James Reimer's desire for "positive depictions of men who represent alternatives to the traditional ideals" of manhood (298).

Milkman's quest for self-knowledge, as unintentional as it is, results in his developing a new set of personal guidelines that enable him to transcend the restrictive images of masculinity offered by Macon and Guitar. He grows with his positive movement forward into a emotional stage that values responsibility and concern for others. With this growth, Milkman relinquishes his earlier sham transgression, the safe violation of Macon and Guitar's hometown rules, and takes on the external codes that are far more threatening. Ironically, it is through these new

genuine aggressions, conflicts, and fistfight that Milkman develops a more compassionate understanding of masculinity. His self-generated concept becomes linked to his family history, and, by extension, the larger community.

Section III: "Traits and Tiers of Masculinity Presented in Tar Baby"

As in the other novels discussed in this chapter, the issue of masculinity and the necessity to conform to male ideals is presented in Tar Baby. James Riemer believes that focusing . . . [upon] manly ideals and their effects on men's lives, men's studies can help us understand the behaviors of male characters in a new light" (294). With this in mind, it is helpful that Morrison relies heavily upon stereotypical class distinctions to create the characters of Valerian Street, Sydney Childs, Son, and Gideon (Yardman). The hierarchal structure, headed by Valerian, the white multimillionaire, completely dominates the representations of masculinity in this novel. The second tier in this hierarchal structure is occupied by Sydney Childs, the snooty butler who refers to himself as a "Phil-a-delphia negro" (163). Next follows Son, the intruder and thief in the Street home. Son is on a lower level than Sydney and defines his masculinity along physical/sexual lines. Finally, Gideon, the "Yardman," relinquishes all striving toward masculine ideals, outlined by the dominant culture, having failed economically in New York and reconciles himself to the role of a dutiful, if belligerent, nephew. These four roles fascinate me because of the heavy reliance upon stock characters.

Nancy Harstock uses the notion of abstract masculinity,

which she claims "accounts for hierarchial dualism in the institutions of society, which underlies relations of class domination and gender domination" (Chodorow 25). Because each man, black and white, in Tar Baby personifies varying images of masculinity and none break from the restrictions governing their behavior, all remain trapped within their roles. The men in this novel adhere so tightly to their respective roles that they forgo the possibility for autonomy and remain stagnant. These roles are not only defined and embodied by the dominant culture, represented by Valerian Street, but also supported within the African American culture, represented by three distinct class members, Sydney, Son, and Gideon.

The first supporter of this system of masculine ideals is Valerian Street. Valerian succeeds in attaining the proper male position, according to the ideal of masculinity he embraces. He is extraordinarily wealthy, which is fulfillment of one male image in and of itself. He possesses a wife, who at fifty is gorgeous: She is a beauty queen, "the principle beauty of Maine" (Tar 11). Eva Feder Kittay states that

within social structures where kinship plays a less critical role in establishing social relations, woman is still the metaphoric vehicle for the value controlled by a man, value through which he establishes his position in the social

order. The 'possession' of a Beautiful Woman takes on the metaphoric role of signifying the greater virility (or money or power) of the man 'possessing' her. (275)

Valerian does possess Margaret and his household, a bucolic island retreat, runs according to his whimsy--with only minor henpecking from his wife and his servants.

Having moved to the Isle des Chevaliers, an island off the coast of Dominique, he turns his home, L'Arbe de la Croix, into a controlled fortress. He not only builds a greenhouse to replicate the northern plants he loves, but also has "mongooses shipped to the island to get rid of snakes and rats" (Tar 39). Lauren Lepow states that "at first seeming a godlike controller of others' destinies, Valerian Street, the wealthy, white owner, presides over his 'paradise.' Sitting in his greenhouse among 'the peonies, the anemones and all their kind' (9), he evokes Milton's Satan's image of a God" (367). Valerian tries to control everything within his sphere: his home, his meals, his wife, and his servants. When Margaret complains that the servants "'tell us what to eat. Who's working for who?'" (Tar 23), Valerian first corrects Margaret's grammar then explains that Ondine's habit of sneaking Postum into his coffee was different--an indulgence rather than an act of disobedience.

Yet, when Margaret forgetfully places the salad servers on the table, rather than returning them to the silver salad

bowl Sydney holds, Valerian barks "'What the hell is the matter with you?'" (Tar 65). So caught up in propriety, Valerian does not realize that Margaret's inability to control her actions at the dining table is indicative of her borderline insanity. Instead, he attributes her behavior to laziness, stupidity, and drunkenness--three things he can understand and three things he can absolve himself of controlling.

Valerian focuses upon trivialities, demonstrating, as Foucault suggests, "the minute disciplines, the panopticism of every day may well be below the level of emergence of the great apparatuses and the great political struggles. But, in the genealogy of modern society, they have been, with the class domination that traverses it, the political counterpart of the juridical norms according to which power was redistributed" (Discipline 223). Valerian defined his responsibilities and his limitations, declaring, "'I can't be responsible for things outside my control'" (Tar 72).

Margaret's problem of not recognizing objects, and the instability it represents, which Valerian alternately bullies than ignores, leads to own Valerian's failure. What is disclosed, and what I have discussed in Chapter II when analyzing Margaret's adherence to codes of femininity, is Margaret's physical abuse of her young son Michael. Because Valerian adheres to his image of masculinity, that of provider, he does not fulfill his debt to his son as

parent/protector.

Valerian's lack of protecting Michael condemns him, a point he only understands at the close of the novel when it is too late to augment his adherence to his masculine role and aid Michael. He does not break from his code of masculinity and loses the possibility to develop an authentic sense of self; however, he does suffer reprisal for ignoring his fatherly obligations.

Valerian details the relationship between Margaret and Michael, placing himself outside responsibility and indicating he is a more natural parent: "I don't hate him. I love him. Margaret thinks I don't. But I do. I think about him all the time. You know . . . this isn't going to sound right . . . But I never was convinced that she did" love him (Tar 76). Valerian recounts an event saying "when [Michael] was just a little thing I came home one day and went into the bathroom. I was standing there and I heard this humming--singing--coming from somewhere in the room. I looked around and then I found it. In the cabinet. Under the sink. He was crouched in there singing. That was the first time, but not the last (Tar 76). Valerian exonerates himself of responsibility, asserting, "I used to try to be it for him, but I wasn't there during the day. She was though. I sometimes had the feeling that she didn't talk to him very much, then it would go away" (Tar 76).

Valerian ignores this feeling, even though he knows

Margaret would "go hot and cold, in and out" and Michael would "miss her so, need her so that when she was attentive he was like a slave to her. Then she'd lose interest again" (Tar 76). Although Valerian knows these things are going on, and acknowledges something else might be going on when he was not at home, Valerian feels absolved of wrong doing.

Because Valerian firmly ensconces himself in the male role of breadwinner, he does not breach the delineations between home and work life. He leaves the responsibility of Michael to Margaret, not intervening and not helping, thereby allowing Margaret's madness to take root and grow. Focusing upon Valerian's abdication of his fathership role, I find Lepow's view quite helpful: "He has long permitted arbitrary roles and values to blind him and must at last convict himself of being guilty . . . of innocence" (209). By supporting the dominant code of masculinity which values economic power over emotional attachments, Valerian not only forsakes personal development but also forsakes his child.

Catherine Rainwater notes that "in its most insidious form, such innocence allows a person to refuse responsibility for 'misreading' a situation, as when in Tar Baby (1981) Valerian Street realizes without sufficient guilt that he had ignored the signs of Michael's suffering" (97).

Later, when Son Green is discovered hiding in Margaret's closet and brought in by Sydney at gunpoint,

Valerian calibrates his reaction to demonstrate his control. He places himself above the frantic reactions of everyone else in the house, thereby exhibiting his embodiment of male power. Again he misreads the situation. Margaret is screaming in panic, Sydney is holding a gun to the man's back planning to "call the harbor," Ondine offers to call to the police, Jadine "said nothing. She did not dare," but Valerian, "in a voice made stentorian by port" said "'Good evening, sir. Would you care for a drink'" (Tar 80).

Son accepts this invitation, matching Valerian's cavalier attitude. Trudier Harris advances that "Valerian knows that Son is performing, and Son knows that Valerian knows that he is performing, but the fiction of his own image as a white person unalterably in control of every situation will not allow Valerian to destroy this current fiction (that is his mythological heritage as surely as the trickster guise is Son')" (Fiction 122). Even when Valerian is aware that he is trapped within his code, he does not rupture it.

Michael Kimmel states that "in the 1960 'the masculine mystique'--that impossible synthesis of sober responsible breadwinner, imperviously stoic master of his fate, and swashbuckling hero--was finally exposed as a fraud" (262). Valerian, however, is not yet ready to relinquish his belief in a "masculine mystique." Thus, Valerian continues his ruse and places Son in the guest quarters, in the room next

to Jadine.

Now, Valerian's choice to establish Son in the guest room, fitted with silk pajamas, and treated like company has many different motivations. Several of these motivations are suggested by the other characters in the novel. Jadine believe's Valerian is "all style," that he has an "antique grace that made him look at a raggedy black man who had been hiding in his wife's closet (with rape, theft or murder on his mind) and say, 'Good evening,' and offer him a drink" (Tar 91).

Sydney senses something else in Valerian's choice. He points out to Ondine that Son had been placed in a guest room, next to Jadine, whereas their quarters--beautiful and spacious though they may be--are over the kitchen, separate. The implication, as Sydney and Ondine see it, is Jadine is compared to a "'stinking ignorant swamp nigger'" (Tar 101).

Placing Son next to Jadine diminishes her position. She is no longer the prized one, an honorary member of the family. With Son in the next guest room, wearing equally lavish clothing and given the right to demand the attentions of the servants, Jadine's uniqueness becomes tentative. By interpreting Valerian's act in this way, Sydney finds his own sense of manhood and validity under attack. He is in a position much like the men on Sweet Home, who are only allowed to act as men rather than claim the status for themselves. Sydney confronts what Clyde Franklin explains

as "the larger social system . . . in which black men participate; the 'societal reference group.' Unfortunately for black men, this often is the most influential group in their lives. Moreover, black men's participation in this group is frequently is constrained or limited" (in Brod 164). Sydney's participation in this larger frame is limited by his class position.

Robert O'Meally believes that "in part to irritate Margaret and the Childes, Valerian lets Son stay on," asserting his power and alerting both Margaret and Sydney of their limited influence (34). Attention to the several different class layers in the novel highlights the various roles of masculinity presented in the novel. Barbara Hill Rigney, recognizing the strict hierarchical structure in Tar Baby states, "Sydney is Sydney to the person he calls Mr. Street, years of intimacy not being sufficient to challenge racial and class protocol" (43). She goes on to observe that "Therese and Gideon are the generic Mary and Yardman to the Streets and, ironically, even to Ondine and Sydney, whose 'superiority' as 'Philadelphia Negroes' depends on such distinctions" (43). It becomes clear that each representative of masculinity, each man that embodies a strict hierarchial role, is limited by his position, and enforces limitations upon the men below them in status.

Breaking from these codes is what is necessary for the men in Tar Baby in order to attain autonomy, yet none of

these male characters break from the definitions of masculinity presented by the American culture and subsequently supported by the African American culture, and the Caribbean culture of Isle des Chevaliers. In fact, what superficially seems to be Valerian's act of transgression of hierarchal codes of masculinity, allowing a vagrant to sit for dinner, is instead strict adherence to the power codes Valerian upholds. Only a man fully convinced of his own situation and control would dare allow the intruder to sleep within his home. Prior to Son's arrival, each man had been functioning according their externally dictated, and internally supported, proper roles of behavior. That is why, in the second pivotal scene I am discussing--at the fateful Christmas dinner, when Valerian hears of Margaret's sadistic behavior and is also confronted by Son--Valerian's downfall is dramatic.

Important in the first pivotal scene, when Son enters, is Valerian's recollection of his son Michael and Michael's condemnation of the under-class for protecting the property and rights of the upper-class. So, "when the black man appeared, Valerian was already in complicity with an overripe peach, and took on its implicit dare. And he invited the intruder to have a drink. The Michael of the reservation and the Michael of the sink was both surprised and pleased" (Tar 145). Thinking of Michael, in his port stupor, Valerian is slightly disgusted with Sydney's desire

to throw out this black man, in order to protect Valerian's house and wife.

He felt "disappointment nudging contempt for the outrage Jade and Sydney and Ondine exhibited in defending property and personnel that did not belong to them from a black man who was one of their own" (Tar 145). In fact, Valerian notes "Sydney and Ondine looking at the prisoner with faces as black as his but smug, their manner struck him as what Michael meant when he said 'bourgeois' in that tone that Valerian always thought meant unexciting, but now he thought meant false, but last night he thought meant Uncle Tom-ish" (Tar 146).

By reassessing these earlier thoughts, Valerian borders upon transgression. He almost overthrows his own system of socially defined masculinity and begins to suspect his hierarchical structure. Yet, this movement is short lived. His momentary struggle for deeper understanding dissolves amidst Margaret's screams and his own desire to exert his position.

In discussing the problematic situation of Valerian's abdication of his fathership role in favor of his culturally defined image of masculinity, Jeff Hearn's ideas offered in a marxist reading of masculinity may help. He notes that "the 'father figure' is becoming transubstantiated into the body of the state, the professions, and the law. These new 'fathers' are both massive material entities and symbolic of

the family father" (20). Utilizing this concept, it is as if Valerian believes he is being a good father by supporting the cultural edict to dedicate himself to his work. Because of Valerian's inability to separate himself from this enculturated concept of manhood, he abjures his genuine fathership role.

In the second pivotal moment of the novel, the payment exacted from Valerian is extreme. Gone are all of his earlier powers, his designated masculinity. Unlike the first dinner, where everyone but Valerian wanted to have the police come from the harbor, now Valerian finds his orders completely ignored.

"'You will leave this house,' said Valerian.

'Now.'"

"'I don't think so,' said Son." (Tar 206)

Taken entirely aback, Valerian states "'I am being questioned by these people, as if, as if I could be called into question!'" (Tar 206) . . . 'Call the harbor!' shouted Valerian, but again there was no one to do his bidding. He had played a silly game, and everyone was out of place" (Tar 208). Margaret, who has all along feared her husband, grows strong. Freed from the burden of her guilt, and dreaming the dream she should have, Margaret begins to rule Valerian. Physically, Valerian's recently substantial body become a reflection of his mental aging. He no longer fights off Sydney's ministrations--he becomes feeble.

Indicative of his decay is the state of his once perfect greenhouse, now overrun by ants and wild with neglect.

Like Valerian, Sydney is prideful of meeting his image of a successful masculine figure. He has provided security and a home for his wife Ondine. Sydney, through his affiliation with the Streets, enables his niece Jadine to become an accomplished, educated woman. Sydney is extremely proud of his position as servant. He performs his job with exactness and refinement. He firmly believes he controls Valerian and Margaret and that they are unwittingly dependent upon him. However, as Kittay notes "men who do not possess value but who are productive, e.g. slaves and laborers, do signify value; however, the signification is literal, not metaphorical . . . that is, they exemplify the value they produce for others" (275). Like the power that Pauline Breedlove wields as the maid of the Fisher home, Sydney's power comes from his tenure in the Street home. Fully embracing his position and the power he believes it grants him, Sydney later snaps into recognizing the true dynamics of the Street Home.

Sydney parallels the men of Sweet Home because, although he can control what Valerian eats, and harass him about clothing worn in the tropics, he cannot control Valerian. Foucault notes that "the perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. . . a perfect eye that nothing would

escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned" (Discipline 173). This is precisely the role that Valerian occupies. From every angle Valerian can monitor the room and Sydney constantly watches Valerian for clues: "Sydney (unbidden but right on time) . . . With a practiced sidelong glance he caught Valerian pressing his thumb to the edge of the soup plate pushing it an inch or so away" (Tar 63). He takes pride in the perfection of his demeanor and orchestration of his work.

Yet, Sydney's claim to manhood is mitigated by Valerian's attitude and actions toward Son. Sydney no longer believes he rules Valerian and he can no longer offer protection for his wife or niece. Therefore, Ondine and Sydney Childs, like Mrs. Breedlove operate within a mock slavery system, and like the men on Sweet Home. Focusing upon the class hierarchy in the novel, Cynthia Davis states:

Morrison makes it clear that this ontological problem is vastly complicated in the context of a society based on coercive power relations. The individual contest for "transcendence" allows, in theory, for mutually satisfying resolutions, as Beauvoir points out: "It is possible to rise above this conflict if each individual freely recognizes the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner." But that relation is

unbalanced by social divisions of power. (326)

The inequalities in Tar Baby are enforced by the fact that both Valerian and Sydney fully support the power structure that limits them to specific definitions of masculinity. In connecting Sydney to the Sweet Home slaves in is interesting to note that Michele Wallace states "a black male slave might also distinguish himself in ways comparable to those available to women slaves. For example he might become the body servant, butler, or coachman of his master. As such, he might, over the years win a great deal of trust and subsequent authority" (Macho 22). Sydney and Ondine perform in this type of role.

They are servants of Valerian and Margaret Street. However, Ondine and Sydney are not merely a cook and a butler. They extend their roles and this is precisely how Ondine and Sydney contribute to the tension in the novel. Bonnie Thornton Dill suggests that "social science has generally supported the idea that Afro-American culture is synonymous with lower-class culture and that it [Afro-American culture] disappears as black Americans gain middle-class status" (Dill 42). This suggests that Sydney and Ondine have removed themselves from the definitions of African American culture by linking themselves to the dominant culture represented by the Streets. As interesting as this concept of competing cultural values is, I do not think that it holds true. Just as I do not agree that

Jadine is a "sell out" because of her class pretensions, I do not think that the Childes have relinquished their allegiance to African American culture. The Childes embrace both cultures, because the dominate culture's definitions of success are part and parcel of the African American definition. If anything, I think there is added cultural value in this position of double-acculturation rather than the replacement theories outlined. Therefore, Sydney is bound to his externally defined masculinity which is outlined by the dominant culture and fully supported by the African American culture.

The unique problem in this figuration is that, due to their reliance on the Streets, the Childs are not only restricted by the hierarchal structures that pervades all employee/employer relationships, but they are secondly limited by the fact that their employment also effects their immediate domestic and personal life. Ultimately, like Morrison's other characters operating in a racially defined hierarchical structure, Ondine and Sydney hold on to their status only because they are allowed to--and this is the drawback.

Much in the way that I parallel the men on Sweet Home with other male characters in Morrison's fiction, I can trace the precedent set by, the hypocritical Mr. Garner's demise up to and including Valerian Street. And like the men of Sweet Home, like Sethe and Baby Suggs, and like Mrs.

Breedlove, the Childs could lose their position instantly because their power is given to them by their employers rather than by their own embodiment of power, a point that only Ondine seems to grasp. bell hooks states that "the old deeply felt belief that black folks should be ever suspicious of the motives and intentions of white folks was replaced with a rhetoric of love that suggested we were all the same" (Sisters 81). Ondine does not fall into this trap, but she worries that both Sydney and Jadine have become too comfortable in their positions and that they have forgotten the tentativeness of their positions.

Valerian and Margaret are so utterly dependent on the Childs' presence they forget the construct. Yet it does exist. Dill notes that Blauner "links racial oppression to economic exploitation and the structure of classes within a capitalist economy" (42). The strict adherence to cultural codes limits the freedom of both the Streets and the Childses by pinning them together in an unacknowledged dependency. Interestingly, Eugene Genovese states that house servants "tried to raise their own image in society at the expense of other slaves, but simultaneously they were narrowing the distance between white and black. They felt superior to the poor whites and even to some solid yeomen; their identification with their masters, far from representing an acceptance of inferiority, gave them a device for asserting superiority over many whites" (330).

This attitude is clearly reflected in the contempt Sydney has for Son:

'You the kind of man that does worry me. You had a job, you chucked it. You got in some trouble, you say, so you just ran off. You hide, you live in secret, underground, surface when you caught. I know you, but you don't know me. I am a Phil-a-delphia Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name. My people owned drugstores and taught school while yours were still cutting their faces open so as to be able to tell one of you from the other' (Tar 163).

The replication of the this system hierarchal superiority embodied by the servant Sydney toward the vagrant Son is, therefor, not unexpected. Just as Sydney fully excepts the established order of things and how it limits his personal freedom, he sees it as right and just for him to enforce the system on Son and Gideon.

The third representation of allegiance to external definitions of masculinity is Son Green. Trudier Harris asserts that "Son is an uncontained force loosed in a world that respects boundaries. That contrast enables him to get away with his antisocial actions, for no one on the island, other than Valerian is equipped with someone so obviously in the raw" (121). More that this, Valerian recognizes that Son's actions are in keeping with a code of masculinity,

which Valerian believes he understands and can control.

It is the character of Son who sets the ball in motion. His presence allows the friction between Margaret and Ondine to mount, toppling the hierarchical structure and permanently shattering Valerian's fantasies of his perfect home. Rigney contends that "because of Son's presence, Valerian's 'innocence' is challenged and his inherent racism revealed; Margaret's deep secret that she tortured her infant son with pines and cigarette burns is exposed; Sydney and Ondine's superior but nevertheless subservient blackness is at least partially subverted" (57). Terry Otten confirms this reading, insisting "it is Son who provides that ultimate rupture by transgressing all of the social codes in the novel: All stand exposed. The community of whites and blacks, owners and servants, is torn asunder when Son, the outcast, threatens the order. His rebellion against Gideon and Therese's dismissal reveals the lies each character has grasped to guard against self-knowledge. Son's display of anger releases Ondine's long held secret . . . that Margaret had abused Michael as a child" (73). After this moment, Valerian's health rapidly declines and he becomes a confused man, dependent on both Margaret and Sydney for guidance. Having failed to break from his limited concept of masculinity, he suffers reprisal without attaining self. Although Son seems to transgress the images of masculinity, his development is limited because of adherence to his own

codes. He breaks Valerian's rules, but not his own.

Through the character of Son, the third representation of a distinct masculine ideal is presented. The description of Son relies heavily upon racial stereotypes and class conscious attitudes. Although the men in Tar Baby are cartoonish, the analysis I am applying is strengthened by their clear allegiance to masculine images. Son is an incarnation of a wild, sensual, sexual black male. Under-educated and utterly primal, Son fulfills the image of masculinity he develops in Eloë, Florida. The mystical undercurrent surrounding Son has a similar magical quality found in Milkman's leap. Son is linked to nature and the earth. He is something other than human. In fact, upon his return to the island he becomes lost in the misty bogs and may join the mythical blind horsemen inhabiting the island. His body seems to mesh with the land, his dreadlocks intertwining with the trees. This ambiguous ending concludes his search for self in an odd manner.

Margaret sees Son exactly the way Son accuses Jadine of seeing him--as a terrified white woman. Otten states that Son "is the manifestation of the black pariah in Western culture, the terrorizing black male, the supposed rapist of white women. To Margaret and the whitewashed blacks at the estate, he represents the 'swamp nigger,' a black 'beast' who jeopardizes a distinctly white Eden" (65). Cornel West's thoughts help to analyze the characterization of Son.

West states that "problematizing of black humanity deprives black people of individuality, diversity, and heterogeneity. It reduces black folk to abstractions and objects born of white fantasies and insecurities--as exotic or transgressive entities, as hypersexual or criminal animals" (West 85). Harris explains that "although Son never attempts to rape anyone in the Street house, his body does figure in the aggressive stance that defines power" (Fiction 120). Morrison is tapping into this racist attitude while describing this character--which she may have done to highlight the divide between the Streets and Son--or she may be utilizing these stereotypes for narrative expedience.

Since my work is a close reading of the texts rather than a dissertation on Morrison's motivations, I shall focus upon the characterization as it stands. As I have stated earlier, I do find the men in this novel to be much more thinly developed than the other characters in Morrison's novels, but I nonetheless find them to be extremely useful in supporting my overriding thesis, that Morrison's characters need to transgress external definition, despite personal risk, to attain autonomy and self-definition. Utilizing a men's studies perspective, Reimer suggests allows us to "examine the effects of these ideals [manly ideals] on men's lives, making us more perceptive about possible limitations and negative consequences of the ideals" (297).

Son does try to develop a coherent sense of self, and it can be argued that he is the only male character in this novel who understands the need for synthesis although he does not attain a cohesive, autonomous self. However, his attempts to integrate his view of manhood with the opposing view held by Jadine creates a rupture in his self-concept. In her world his sexual prowess is curbed by his lack of manners. His physical strength and knowledge of the earth dismissed by his lack of degrees. His journey north leads him to confusion rather than the clarity attained by Paul D or Milkman. Because he does not relinquish external definitions of masculinity, he remains trapped in his role. As Gergen indicates, "social relationships become opportunities for enactment, the boundary between the real and the presented self--between substance and style --is erased," (Gergen 155) a situation which Son discovers in New York.

In fact, his move from the island to New York simply supplants his previous ideal of masculinity with a new ideal, Jadine's. Neither ideal is self created, and therefore he lacks the transgressive quality that would enable him to attain autonomy. By leaving but not breaking from his comfort zone of Eloë, Son loses his balance and perceptions of the world. With Jadine, he finds that "it was all mixed up. He had it straight before: the pie ladies and the six-string banjo and then he was seduced, corrupted

by cloisonne and raw silk the color of honey and he was willing to change, to love the cloisonne, to abandon the pie ladies and the nickel nickelodeon and Eloë itself" (Tar 299). He has traded in his working class image in for the elitist Jadine's elitist model.

He never fully transgresses the restrictions of the street home, and he simply supplants Valerian, Sydney's or Ernie Paul's concept of masculinity with Jadine's. Robert O'Meally argues that in Morrison's "novel of classic confrontation between the 'bourgeois' black woman and the 'downhome' black man, some of the most passionate writing emerges from passages concerning the meaning of blackness" (34). Yet, Son does not attain autonomy. He does not develop "the qualities deemed necessary for adulthood--the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision making, and responsible actions--are those associated with masculinity" (Gilligan 550).

Clyde Franklin explains that there "is a relationship between structural barriers to black men's advancement and the increasing decimation of black men, especially when black men believe the societal reference group socialization message exhorting them to adopt the Prince charming ideal with little possibility for enactment" (in Brod 166). This is the problematic situation Gideon discovered when he had tried to escape the island by moving to the US. Having attempted to fulfill this image, Gideon moved to the US and

drove a taxi. His claims of economic stability attained in New York only lead him back to the island duped by Thérèse. Just as he had falsely claimed to have wealth, she had falsely claimed to have property. When he rejects the masculine model of urban success and returns to the island to fulfill his more genuine conception of masculinity, he discovered that Therese was the only property she had. He pays for his earlier pretense, but his life on Le Isle des Chevaliers is no worse than the cramped and unclean conditions of the city. He becomes reconnected to the land, and content remaining on the externally defined lowest rung of the social hierarchy headed by Valerian.

Gideon represents something to Son, something in line with the music of schoolchildren encountered by Milkman in the South. But unlike Milkman, Son does not pursue it and instead feels relief when Gideon turns away from him. Son thinks, "Some other way of being in the world that he felt leaving him when he stood in the white towel watching Yardman's--Gideon's--back" (Tar 166). Son allows the reflection of another form of masculinity to evaporate and instead continues to chase the images of manhood established by external, hierarchal structures.

Valerian Street, Sydney Childs, Son Green are all trapped by their participation in the cultural definitions of masculinity. Although each man functions on a different level according to their class identification, they all

support the hierarchial structure that limits their freedom and the ability to develop an autonomous self.

Conclusion

My analysis of Toni Morrison's fiction centers upon the development of characters that are restricted by cultural codes dictating behavior according to definitions of race and gender. What I have hoped to prove is that Morrison's first five novels delve into the ramifications of American cultural dictates controlling the behavior of both men and women, blacks and whites. In addition to the wealth of critical analysis devoted to issues of race and the problems confronted by women in Morrison's work, I find that the larger context of cultural oppression is also extended towards the characters who embody the cultural ideals. Therefore, it is significant that the characters such as Amy Denver, the Garners, the Bodwins, as well as Jadine Childes and Valerian and Margaret Street are enmeshed in the limitations of the cultural definitions which they support and perpetuate. The inability of these characters to rupture the various cultural codes of race and gender limits their ability to develop self-awareness and agency. Except for Amy and Jadine, this lack of transgression leaves each of these characters bemused and distraught at the shattered form of their lives.

In contrast, the characters that strive to redefine themselves and their situations develop an autonomous definition of self against the prevailing cultural codes that attempts to limit just such autonomy and self

definition. Milkman Dead, Paul D, Sethe, Pilate, and Sula, by virtue of their transgressiveness, become alienated from their environments and occupy the status of an outlaw and/or pariah. Each of these characters risks personal safety and interpersonal relationships because of their necessity to break from the restrictive nature of the cultural codes that impinge upon their own developing consciousness. The directive ideology that codifies proper masculine and feminine behavior in each of these novels is rejected by these representative characters as are the limitations of racial definitions and expectations. For Milkman and Sethe the results of their transgressions are ambiguously ended in each novel--do they live or die? This question is left open ended which I believe heightens the possible reprisals that these two transgressive characters face. Both Sula and Pilate, having fully enjoyed their lives and the positions they claimed outside the parameters that define proper female behavior, die at the close of the novels confirming that payment is exacted from those characters who pursue and achieve autonomy.

Most striking in Morrison's fiction are the characters who allow the oppressive structures of racial codes of behavior, as well as cultural codes of femininity and masculinity, to control and destroy their lives. The painful results of lives curtailed by these external expectations are exemplified by Pauline, Cholly and Pecola

Breedlove, Nel Wright, Hagar, Guitar Bains and Macon Dead. Macon Dead, like Nel Wright, actively pursues the images of proper behavior that is dictated by the dominant culture. Macon so completely ingests the images of a successful white businessmen that he allows himself to become an alien in the midst of his black community and an enemy of his own sister Pilate. Macon's adherence to the codes of material success, the definition of masculinity that he supports, limits his ability to develop any form of agency outside of the parameters of middle class behavior. Similarly, Nel Wright's support of the dictates of middle class behavior and feminine ideals of motherhood presented by the dominant American culture prevent her from pursuing her true desires. Her life becomes entwined in false codes of propriety, and she loses vital contact with Sula and sacrifices her internal, independent self in order to maintain the external codes dictating her behavior.

By completely embracing the romanticized images of feminine beauty, ideal motherhood, and the superiority of whiteness, Pauline, Pecola, and Hagar destroy themselves. Pauline's homelife is a mockery of her fantasy life carried out in the white world of the Fisher's household; Pecola's madness is so complete that even after believing that she has been granted the blue eyes of Shirley Temple, she rummages around in the vacant lots in town wishing that her eyes were even bluer; and Hagar's desire to possess the

commodities and accoutrements to transform her beautiful black face and hair into the white images of fashion magazines leads directly to her death. These three women are strong examples of the corrupting power of the cult of beauty and the images of white middle class womanhood.

Equally horrific is the manner in which Cholly Breedlove and Guitar Bains consume the codes of masculinity and the oppression of racial restrictions and then reproduce these limitations to destroy themselves. Cholly's inability to alleviate the horror of his economic position and the condemnation of the white and middle-class blacks around him leads him to embrace their disdain. He chooses to accept these definitions and perpetuate his own decline.

Ultimately, the rape of his young daughter is his muted retaliation at the culture that has made her feel worthless and is the act that confirms Pecola's path toward madness. Guitar also imbibes the cultural definitions of manhood and racial codifications. Like Cholly, his attempts to rebel against these limitations become inverted and he propels himself onto a destructive path of violence which ironically confirms the cultural dictates he wishes to destroy.

By focusing upon these issues, I hope to highlight the didactic quality of Morrison's writing. I believe Morrison's writing is not only literarily beautiful but is also instructive. Her characters struggle with issues that have cultural significance and resonance. I have attempted

to continue the discussions of Morrison's fiction by outlining the codes of racially discriminating structures stemming from slavery, through the Jim Crow period and separate but equal policies, up to the class struggles of the late 1900's. In conjunction with these restrictive structures I have added the qualifications of cultural codes of femininity and masculinity to discuss what I believe to be a unifying theme in Morrison's fiction. It is my assertion that Morrison's fiction calls attention to these cultural codes that limit autonomy and self-development in order to emphasize the need to transgress these limitations and develop self-knowledge and agency within and against these cultural constructions.

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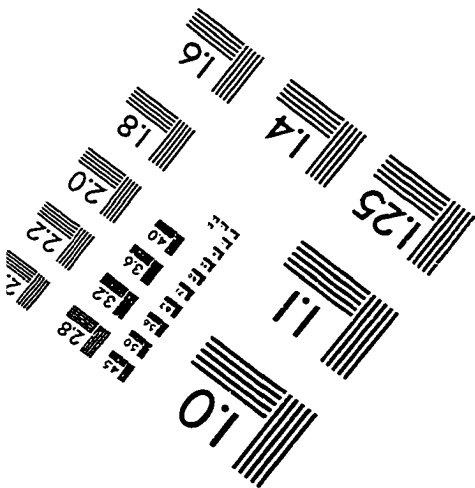
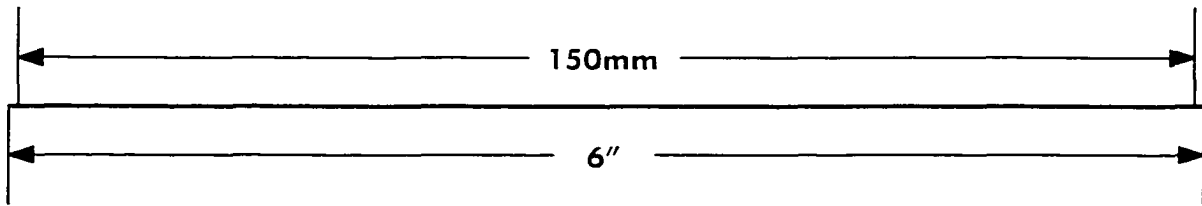
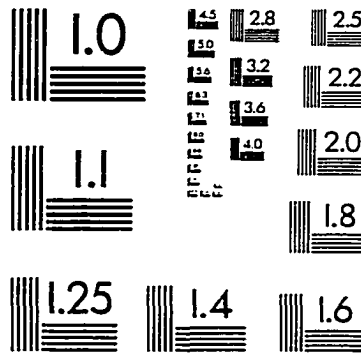
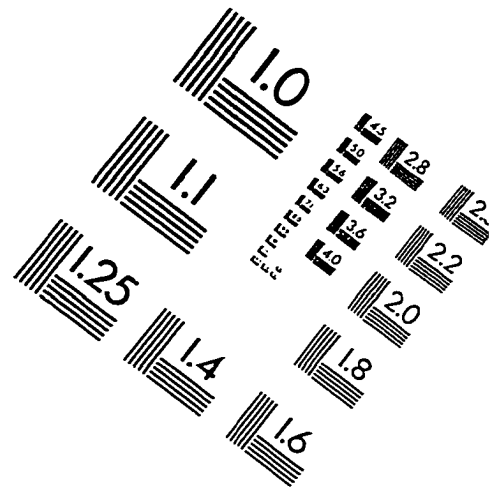
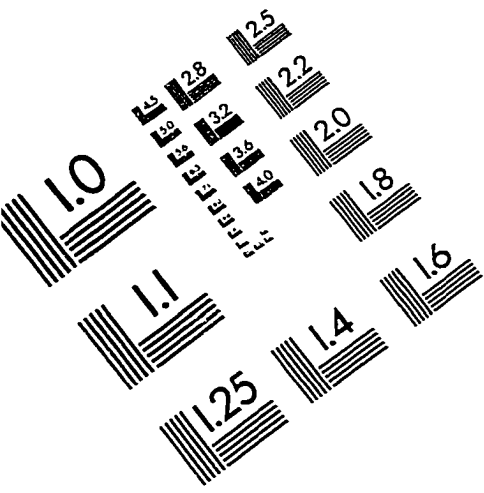
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