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**Susmita  
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**Toni Morrison's *Jazz*: A New Social Text**

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In her prefatory note to *Circles of Sorrow, Line of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison* Gurleen Grewal says: "Novels such as *The Bluest Eye* show me something I had always suspected but never fully realized, either in literature or in the ways of reading I had been taught: the saving power of narrative, its capacity to open a door, to point out the fire *and* the fire escape – in short, the profound work that narrative can do for the social collective, and the work that such a narrative in turn demands from us"(x). The profound quality of such a narrative, its saving power to resist readers to accept any single 'truth' and also urging them to remake the 'truth', so long inferred, is one of the most remarkable and unique features of Morrison's fictional projects. Literary texts that reflect representational 'truth' of history/trauma influence readers in reshaping and remaking their thoughts, which is done not by the autonomous and deterministic closure of the narrative but by its power of igniting imagination. In her Nobel Lecture (1993) Morrison has told, "Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created." The pedagogic process of making and remaking of meaning forms a new representation of historical 'reality', which contributes to make a new social text. The significance of writer-reader venture in remaking History/Sociology has been pointed out by the griot in the final part of Morrison's Nobel acceptance speech "Finally,' she says, 'I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together.'"(Peterson 272, 273).

The purpose of the following essay is to further the research line by making a detailed analysis on how a narrative widens a reader's skill of evaluation by developing a new approach in him, who by making a new meaning out of it remakes the narrative and offers a new representation. In my project I will attempt to show how telling and retelling of stories work as healing therapy for those who go through painful experiences of history and trauma. In particular I want to focus on *Jazz* (1992), Morrison's sixth novel because the novel registers a collaborative/mutual space between speaker and listener, writer and reader, who in their joint venture of surveying the past, the African American social history, forge a livable present and a viable future. In short, my article is an in-depth study on a new social text, offered by *Jazz*, that challenges a single, unified 'truth' and presents multidimensional 'truth' in its scrutinized exploration of everyday life as it is 'lived' by black people, particularly by the black women. My project is an endeavor to demonstrate that the new text in *Jazz* is a fictional representation of the story of black women, which seems to be historically more 'real' and more 'authentic' than the documents, presented from the perspective of power merchants.

*Jazz* is a sequel to *Beloved* in recalling a traumatized past. Morrison has presented in front of public a painful past, history of dispossession and loss not in the manner of a chronicle historian but as a therapeutic historian/sociologist. The avoidance of a painful history or its suppression can not heal the traumatized but often makes the victim behave in misbalanced and unruly manner which may cause further pain and that can be threatening for social and political arrangements. Regarding the effect of trauma Cathy Caruth points out, "Since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (*Trauma* 8). *Jazz* opens with the gossiping voice of a narrator who presents casually in front of readers some facts of Joe and Violet's hard case:

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

Very soon the readers are informed that the case is not registered juridically “because nobody actually saw him do it, and the dead girl’s aunt didn’t want to throw money to helpless lawyers or laughing cops when she knew the expense wouldn’t improve anything. Violet’s misbalancing/unruly behaviour is not considered esteemed enough to regard her as “someone needing assistance” by “Salem Women’s Club”. So, Joe-Violet case demands a careful study, a different hearing/counter hearing, in order to write a different social text by a responsible reader. Readers’ position is like that of Violet who is “left . . . to figure out on her own what the matter was and how to fix it” (4). It is not a question “. . . who shot whom” (6) that matters but its investigation, a different, critical investigation that must be adopted to bring a therapeutic solution not only for the particular victims but also for those who suffer the traumas of history. In the novel the present occupies a space of absence with a sense of loss and abandonment; what is traumatic is the repetition of the violent past Joe and Violet left behind. *Jazz* as its name signifies, supplies readers solos, duets, trios and also a mediator, some Ms. Know-all, mysterious narrator. The reader should be alert not to let the traumatic past encompass the present. In order to release the present from the trap of past a retrospective/re-imaginative pattern of individual/collective stories must be told and retold both by speakers and listeners. Toni Morrison once said, “The only thing I can do, and have done, and will do is somehow to incorporate into the world that horror you feel when something awful happens, to redistribute the moral problem so other people can have this connection with another’s pain. That what art does. It manages that kind of horror; it makes it possible for the person to go on” (qtd. in Walsh). It is not only the moment of the traumatic event that is critical but passing out of it also becomes a crisis for those who undergo trauma. The survivors are possessed with the horrible memory of that repressed past and the only genuine exorcism lies in collective hearing.

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

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

The young woman rescued her lover by refusing to identify him. The mystery of such love, which is of course a woman’s love, moved Morrison. She protected the seedling of this story line, nurtured it carefully until her creative mind bloomed it into *Jazz*. In her 1985 interview with Gloria Naylor Morrison explained that she was obsessed by two or three little fragments of stories which she heard from different places; one was a newspaper clipping about a woman called Margaret Garner, a run away slave woman who had killed her daughter to save her from enslavement and another was the funeral story, mentioned above. Both are the stories of black women and their sacrifices: one gives up her self for her child and the other sacrifices it for her lover. About the inter-relation between these two stories, Morrison explained to Naylor in the same interview:

Now what made those stories connect, I can’t explain, but . . . in both instances, something seemed clear to me. A woman loved something other than herself so much. She had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself. That the woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she would not see them hurt . . . . And that the woman had loved a man or had such affection for a man that she would postpone her own medical care or go ahead and die to give him time to get away so that, more valuable than her life, was not just her life but something else connected with his life. . .

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

. . . what it is that really compels a good woman to displace the self, her self. So what I started doing and thinking about for a year was to project the self not into the way we say “yourself”, but to put a space between those words as though the self were really a twin or a thirst or a friend or something that sits right next to you and watches you, which is what I was talking about when I said “the dead girl.” So I had just protected her out in the earth. . . . So I just imagined the life of a dead girl which was the girl that Margaret Garner killed, the baby girl that she killed (208).

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

This ‘dead girl’ image is the embodiment of absence/loss that engulfs the present in *Jazz*. In the first few pages of the novel the narrator supplies almost all the information: the thirty years’ troubled marital status of Joe and Violet, Joe’s shooting of the eighteen year old girl Dorcas, with whom Joe had fallen in love, Violet’s revenge in defacing the corpse, her craving for a baby that almost led her to ‘stealing’ a baby (21), the ‘restless nights’ (13), passed by Joe and Violet after the incident etc. When the readers think that there is nothing left to know about the tragic triangulated love affair, the narrative takes a sudden twist with “Good luck and let me know.” Violet decides to gather the information of Dorcas because she thinks that she would “. . . solve the mystery of love that way.” So she questioned everybody: from Malvonne, an upstairs neighbour she came to know that her apartment was used as ‘a love nest’ by Joe and Dorcas; the legally licensed beauticians informed her “what kind of lip rouge the girl wore;” (5) and finally she reached to Alice Manfred, Dorcas’s aunt, who showed the girl’s picture to Violet and also allowed her to keep it for a few weeks (6). Violet kept the photo on the fireplace mantle. Now this photograph like an isolated historical document such as the Van Der Zee photograph becomes the most necessary thing for them to pass their ‘restless nights’(13), that does not tell them what they need to know but ignites in them a keen desire to know a distant past which would probably help them to comprehend their present situation:

And a dead girl’s face has become a necessary thing for their nights . . . . What seems like the only living presence in the house: . . . . If the tiptoeer is Joe Trace, driven by loneliness from his wife’s side, then the face stares at him without hope or regret and it is the absence of accusation that wakes him from his sleep hungry for her company. No finger points . . . . But if the tiptoeer is Violet the photograph is not that at all. . . . It is the face of a sneak who glides over to your sink to rinse the fork you have laid by her plate. An inward face - whatever it sees is its own self. You are there, it says, I am looking at you (12-13).

The “dead girl” becomes an “inward face” of both Violet and Joe, watching them curiously as though “a twin or thirst or a friend. . . .” (Interview with Gloria Naylor 208). Thus Dorcas who is no more in the present encompasses both Joe and Violet in such a manner that they themselves have become an embodiment of the ‘dead girl’/absence/loss/dispossession. Their present epitomizes what they have lost, which they want to forget. But forgetting a history, whether it is of an individual or that of a collective cannot be a solution for the traumatized; it must be brought into daylight to represent in a new text of (sociology) with its reconstructed meaning for the healing of the traumatized.

*Jazz* opens in 1926, when Harlem seems to be the centre of a new historical era. In the novel the narrator expresses the mood and feelings, generated with the approach of the new era with her strong fascination for the city, which she emphasizes with capital ‘C’: “I’m crazy about this City.” Then she goes on illustrating its charm with a note of enthusiasm:

City in 1926 when all the wars are over and there will never be another one. . . .  
At last, at last, everything’s ahead. The smart ones say so and people listening

to them and what they write down agree: Here comes the new. Look out. There goes the sad stuff. The bad stuff. . . . History is over, you all, and everything's ahead at last. (7)

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

*Jazz* highlights a wide gap between what seemed to be the fulfilment of all desires, a keynote to Harlem Renaissance and what it turned out practically. The novel revises the image of "New Negro", a reference that might be connected to Alain Locke's important collection in 1925, *The New Negro*. The formation of subjectivity of the Negro and that of his identity was the dynamic force of the Jazz Age. His identity was to be formed not according to the perception of whites as intellectually and spiritually inferior being but as a 'Man'. This image of "New Negro" is replaced by working class men and women, whose status are totally different from the glamorous position of the writers and musicians, patronized by whites. Joe Trace is a door to door salesman of Cleopatra beauty products. Before he starts selling cosmetic goods he "cleaned fish at night and toilets in the day" (127); his wife does hair; Malvonne cleans offices and Alice is a seamstress. More often the novel conveys a strong sense of a promised land for African Americans in Harlem but they rarely have an access to the spheres of social, economic and educational opportunities. The narrative voice points out the inequities which were prominent in the city thus:

. . . everything you want is right where you are: the church, the store, the party, the women, the man, the postbox (but no high schools), the furniture store, street newspaper vendors, the bootleg houses, (but no banks), the beauty parlours, the barbershops. . . and every club, organization, group, order, union, society, brotherhood, sisterhood or association imaginable (10).

The novel also focuses on the bitter socio-economic realities faced everyday by black people in the city where racial violence is internalized, made visible in the interiority of their lives, lived everyday. Joe remembers struggling with Violet in their early years in Harlem, marching in the Armistice parade for the coloured regiments, and overcoming the "lighter-skinned renters" who wanted to keep them out of Lenox Avenue's nicer apartments: "When we moved from 140th Street to a bigger place on Lenox, it was the light-skinned renters who tried to keep us out. Me and Violet fought them, just like they was whites" (127). In an atmosphere of dispossession and longing people were exploiting each other. The husband has betrayed his wife but kills another girl for 'betraying' him. The wife treats the girl most savagely for dispossessing her of her husband. Alice Manfred is scared and feels herself "truly unsafe because the brutalizing men and their brutal women were not just out there, they were in her block, her house" (74). In her utter confusion of the life style of black people Alice keeps her niece away from the "kind of Negro", "the embarrassing kind" (79). She cannot make out what made people act so violently? So she asks Violet, "Don't they fight all the time? When you do their hair, you're not afraid they might start fighting?" (84). Her ironical comment on the furies and revenges, inflict on blacks by blacks is noteworthy:

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

This passage reflects on the internal conflict that had consumed the whole community of blacks like the side effects of some powerful drug which the black people had swallowed in the name of Harlem Renaissance. The 'New Negro' image and its slogan of self assertive manhood, ashamed the black man in his own failure. Since the past a sense of lacking 'something' is so much dominating in him that the 'New Negro' image drowned his manhood and arouse in him a sense of self doubt and self hatred, which, on the other hand also contributed to bringing injuries to each other. The narrative voice replicates on the slavery's system of disparity in wages between the male and female workers: "There were bully cotton crops in Palestine and people for twenty miles around were going to pick it. Rumor was the pay was ten cents for young women , a quarter for men" (102). This manner of keeping discrimination between black men and women not only humiliates the black men but also spurs their manhood to prove their superiority within their own home and the relationship between black men and black women worsens.

In her interview with Nellie Mckey Morrison says, "Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord" (155). The function of jazz is to speak desire and in Morrison's novel Jazz becomes the voice of unfulfilled desire. She sees in this unfulfilled desire a "quality of hunger and disturbance" which is specifically African American's and that it is "an ineffable quality . . . that is obviously black" (153). What is traumatic is not only a sense of loss but also its reiteration as something lacking/absent that persists and occupies a palpable emotional space: the presence of absence. The music that Alice Manfred hears is not "real music – Just colored folks' stuff; . . . not real, not serious. . . . It faked happiness, faked welcome, but it did not make her feel generous," (59). The experience of loss is felt not only by individuals who have been separated from parents, children, spouses, lovers, but by an entire community who have been uprooted by a legacy of cultural dislocation. Violet shares with Alice a sense of stuffy idleness that she experiences in her everyday city life thus: "We picked cotton, chopped wood, plowed. I never knew what it was to fold my hands. This here is as close as I ever been to watching my hands doing nothing", says Violet to Alice (112). In the opinion of Ann Douglass "African Americans whose ancestors were kidnapped from their native land and sold into slavery in an alien country, were, in fact, America's only truly orphan group" (83). While representing the experience of loss, Morrison has populated *Jazz* with a number of orphans: Violet, Joe and Dorcas - who in their sufferings of loss and abandonment also suffer a sense of lacking, (physical and emotional) because of denial and dispossession by their parents. Violet became orphan when her "phantom father" (100) deserted the family to seek his fortune, leaving his wife Rose Dear, to raise their five young daughters. Rose, first being alienated from her mother early in her life and later being separated by her husband, finally could not recover the trauma of dispossession of her house and land and committed suicide by jumping into a well. Violet was so moved by her mother's distress that she took an important decision in her life, ". . . never never have children" (102). The decision of remaining childless later haunts her and creates a kind of "mother hunger" in her, so intense that she "started sleeping with a doll in her arm" (129). The sense of loss which was first felt by a daughter inside Violet later changes into something different, a mother's longing/yearning, too intense to overlook. The presence of that absence becomes so much acute in her that she imagines Dorcas, as a girl young enough to be that daughter who "... fled her womb?" The narrative voice speculates the violence of Violet in mutilating the face of the dead girl as being "a crooked kind of mourning for a rival young enough to be a daughter" (109, 111). Dorcas Manfred is raised by her aunt Alice Manfred after her father is "pulled off a streetcar and stomped to death and her mother "burned crispy in its flame" (57). For Dorcas, the pain of loss is discerned in her faded memory of the St. Louis race riots which not only killed her parents but also preyed her 'clothespin dolls'(38). Joe trace, being abandoned by his mother at birth and raised by another family retains his 'trace' (Joe Trace) as his parents "disappeared without a trace" (124). He makes "three solitary journeys" to find "the woman he believed was his mother" (175). In the novel Wild who is referred to as Joe's mother is present in her absence; "everywhere and nowhere" (179). This sense of absence and loss in Joe draws him closer to Dorcas, in whose "faint hoof marks", "underneath her cheekbones" Joe traces his mother Wild (130). Dorcas, another orphan in the novel, in her anguish remembers the "slap across her face, the pop and sting of it" which was given by her mother to the child daughter who 'yelled' to her mother for getting her 'box of dolls' from the fiery house. She can never forget that slap because "it was the last" (38). Both Joe and Dorcas suffer from emotional abandonment and in their utter yearning to fill up the gap of "inside nothing" (37) they try to fill it up for each other: "Somebody called Dorcas with hooves tracing her cheekbones and who knew better than people his own age what that inside nothing was like. And who filled it for him, just as he filled it for her, because she had it too" (37-38). John Bowlby says that a person who has experienced a loss "mislocates" the absent figure in some other figure in his or her life, regarding that person as "in certain respects a substitute for someone lost," but for whom ultimately no substitute can suffice (161). Thus Morrison's Joe Trace, "a long way from Virginia, and even longer from Eden" (180), in his

obsession with his mother follows the trail from “. . . where is she?”(184) to “There she is” (187). The yearning to fill up the emptiness that the son inside Joe feels, ends up in locating a wrong figure, in his young lover, namely Dorcas who herself is the personification of absences. When Dorcas leaves him in preference for a younger man Acton, Joe shoots her as if to stop the endless circle of betrayal, caused to black people by the treason of history. In his bold attempt to stick to his ‘tracks’, Joe repeats the violence of history and Dorcas has to sacrifice to the repetition of the process of history. He soliloquises in his utter disappointment, “In this world the best thing, the only thing, is to find the trail and stick to it. I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me right to her, and I tracked Dorcas from borough to borough. . . . Something else takes over when the track begins to talk to you, give out its signs. . . . But if the trail speaks, no matter what’s the way, you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it’s the heart you can’t live without (130). Another orphan’s story in *Jazz* is that of Golden Gary’s. When he reaches the age of eighteen Vera Louis, his foster mother told him that his father was a “black-skinned nigger (143). After knowing this he makes his journey to trace his father in the Virginia woods and finds out the cabin of the woodsman Henry Lestroy/Les Troy. It is the same Virginia woods where many years later Joe would search his mother. While waiting for the arrival of his father, he reflects his feelings on his missing father in visceral terms as an amputation of an arm:

Only now . . . now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everybody was one armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. . . . I don’t need the arm. But I do need to know what it could have been like to have had it. It’s a phantom I have to behold. . . . This part of me that does not know me, has never touched me or lingered at my side. . . . I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of it disfigurement (158-159).

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

At the nexus of the history of loss lies the history of black women who suffer dispossession, betrayal, natal alienation along with the age long oppression of class, race and gender done on black people in general. According to Grewal, “*Jazz* highlights the consciousness of black women’s struggle to survive the violence of disfranchisement reverberating across generations, across the North-South and rural-urban divide, a violence that is rendered in the elusive and mute figure of Wild (123). Wild is also an embodiment of “the dead girl” about whom Morrison has talked in her interview with Gloria Naylor. In the novel this mute figure allures us to follow the trails back to 1873, when Morrison’s *Beloved* opens with Seth and Denver as the “only victims” of a “baby’s venom” and ends in the same year with *Beloved*’s leaving, taking “the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling. . . . She stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight” (3, 261). In *Jazz* in the year 1863, Golden Gray, “. . . a long way from home”, in search for his father sees “In the trees. . . a naked berry-black woman” (144) who was covered with mud and leaves. When the woman sees him she starts running out of her horror and knocks her head against a tree. Wild’s reaction to Golden Gray is similar to *Beloved*’s terror of “men without skin” (*Beloved* 210). Thus Wild in *Jazz*, “indecent speechless lurking insanity” (179) is an incarnation of African American women who have endured the brutality of slavery; her muteness speaks of their wound of tongue, harnessed or clamped by iron bit. She lays bare the history’s wound of denial and dispossession, done to blacks and particularly to black women. Even years later the condition of black women do not change. In the city, after the Reconstruction Violet experiences the exploitative work conditions; she does not have the necessary license, required for a beautician and so she must be at “beck and call” of women who want to have their hair done in return of low wages. The task of reclaiming ‘Wilds’/black women must be rendered into some responsible readers who would collect bits and pieces of black women’s “lived lives” and weave a new story/history by rendering their imagination into it that would not only heal their wound by enabling them resist the trauma but also open up a new narrative technology, based on a negotiation between reader and writer. Thus a narrative becomes a healing as well as a collective and interactive project. By setting her story in the Harlem of the 20s, Morrison reminds us how the movement failed in fulfilling the black female desires when Harlem itself was an enactment of the fulfilment of all desires: “. . . it does pump desire”, the narrative voice says (34). The black women’s age-long hunting for something better worsens the situation with the physical transference from rural South to urban North at which they can’t do anything but conceal their sorrow “they don’t know where from ” (161). In the city the longing for rest is attractive to Violet,

'but' as the narrator says, "I don't think she would like it . . . these women . . . they wouldn't like it." That much span of time in the name of rest though is alluring for these black women, they feel suffocated in overpowering drowsiness, created by idleness: "They are busy and thinking of ways to be busier because such a space of nothing pressing to do would knock them down . . . They fill their mind and hands with soap and repair . . . because what is waiting for them, in a suddenly idle moment is the seep of rage. Molten. Thick and slow-moving. Mindful and particular about what in its path chooses to bury" (16). Violet's "private cracks" is not hers alone but of all black women's who endure negligence and humiliation since ages unknown. Her "private cracks" are part of that "dark fissures in the globe light of the day." (22) which is itself "imperfect"; "Closely examined it shows seams, ill-glued cracks and weak places beyond which is anything. Anything at all" (23). Violet sees that she is living other's life: "In each one something specific is being done: food things, work things; customers and acquaintances are encountered, places entered. But she does not see herself doing these things . She sees them being done" (22). It is because the globe light of the conscious mind is run by that dominant ideology that does not see women as its agent. In Violet Morrison wants to project that self that would be hers own, as she has said in the interview with Naylor, "I had been living some other person's life. It was too confusing. I was interested primarily in the civil rights movement. And it was in that flux that I thought . . . there would be no me. Not us or them or we, but no me. And you knew better. You knew inside better. You knew you were not the person they were looking at . . . . And I wanted to explore it myself" (199). Violet's unconscious 'stumbling' into the 'cracks' (23) makes her action violent as defacing the corps of Dorcas. But ultimately her violent action brings the subjectivity for herself which she can claim as her own. In the later part of the novel Violet shares her experience of transformation with Felice. She says that she "messed up" her life by letting the world change her. In her blind imitation of the image of dominant ideology assigned for woman she wanted to become "White. Light. Young again." She forgot that it was her life and nobody else's and so she just ran up and down the streets wishing she was "somebody else" (208). Felice then asks her what she did to this image and Violet replies, "killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her." When she is asked, "who's left?" Violet says, "Me" in such way as if ". . . it was the first she heard of the word" (209). Thus Violet demonstrates her ability to create herself through the process of killing that part of her which stood as impediment for achieving that personality. Of course such transformation for Violet has become possible as a result of spending some hours with Alice by sharing those fragments of stories with her who listened to Violet and also told her own and thus both of them formed a bond between them after the death of Dorcas. Together they contemplated the travails of black women: "Eating starch, choosing when to trade yoke, sewing, picking, cooking, chopping. Violet thought about it all and sighed. 'I thought it would be bigger than this. I knew it wouldn't last, but I did think it'd be bigger.'" Both recognize tinges of sorrow in each other. Dorcas's death, metaphorically, the presence of absence, which they filled up for each other, brought the two women closer to each other. As Alice stitches up the torn linen of Violet's coat, she listens to Violet minutely and repairs her own tattered self. The narrator says, "By this time the women had become so easy with each other talk wasn't always necessary. Alice ironed and Violet watched. From time to time one murmured something – to herself or to other" (112). Thus Morrison in her new manner of rewriting the history of black women has shown how the solidifying bond between women can hasten the therapeutic process of healing on blacks who have been affected by the traumatic effects of geographical and emotional dislocation, Migration brought for them. By the end of the novel the wounded triad of Joe-Violet-Dorcas is replaced by the healing triad of Joe-Violet-Felice. Though the history of denial, dispossession and depression is almost unavoidable in the lives of black women they must not allow themselves to be subdued by its reiteration. The trauma of history must be prevented from being all consuming. True to the spirit of the Age is the title of the novel *Jazz* in which a sense of loss as well as a note of yearning vibrates and reverberates in its music, i.e. in its solos, duets, trios; the characters are bound to it yet they have space to improvise and go ahead of the beat.

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

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

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

Morrison’s novel emphasizes the role of narration in rewriting the history of black women. Though at first the narrator seems to be overconfident in predicting the narrative action, later the deterministic nature of a narrative is realized. The narrative voice confesses how she missed the most ‘obvious’ and the most ‘original’ aspect of the characters; that they are the most ‘complicated’, ‘changeable’ and that the very nature of their ‘humanness’- were all that she failed to understand while ‘meddling’ their lives. Being overconfident of her capability of ‘finger-shaping’ she was quite sure that “one would kill the other” because “That past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle”(220). Through such narrative confession Morrison seems to acknowledge that Historical violence can never make life static and that characters go ahead of History’s age-long treason, treachery and violence. It is the function of both the writer and the reader to “lift the arm” of the creative historian/ sociologist “that held the needle” (220) deep down the grave of things “too terrible to relate” (The Site of Memory 112) to rewrite the history of people in such a manner as the narrator in the novel says, which will be “both snug and wide open” (221). If the focus of the narrative is to project the damage of history, such confession on the part of the narrative voice also registers a space for narrative reparation. In “*Art of Fiction*” Morrison links the ability of learning something out of a mistake to jazz as a mode, “In a performance you make mistake, and you don’t have the luxury of revision that a writer has; you have to make something out of a mistake, and if you do it well enough it will take you to another place where you never would have gone had you not made that error. So you have to be able to risk making that error in performance” (116-117). The narrative voice then announces her task of ripping “the veil drawn over ‘proceedings too terrible to relate’”(The Site of Memory 112) through the mute figure of Wild so that an alternative or counter narrative other than something from muted perspective can be offered to displace the hegemonic narratives in a culture’s memory: “I wouldn’t mind. Why should I? She has seen me and is not afraid of me. She hugs me. Understands me. Has given me her hand. I am touched by her. Released in secret” (221). In the attempt of laying bare the wounds, inflict on black women by the treason of history, the narrative voice urges a space for agency so that the “Wilds” would not remain speechless any longer. The novel ends with readerly/ writerly desire: “Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now” (229). This talking voice of the narrative is an appeal to the readers to lay hands on past so that a new interpretation can be delivered by the joint venture of the reader and the writer. Thus Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* registers reader’s participation in remaking /rewriting social text that resists predetermined cycle of history.

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