

1993

Racism and sexism in toni morrison's tar baby

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UB, FACULTE DES LETTRES ET SCIENCES HUMAINES

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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Department of English Language and Literature

RACISM AND SEXISM
IN TONI MORRISON'S TAR BABY

by

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of requirements for the degree
"Licence en Langue et Littérature Anglaises"

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In memory of my late sister Adèle.

To my parents.

To my brothers and sisters.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people: parents, siblings, friends and others have contributed to the completion of this work. They are its soil and climate.

First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. John ENGELS, who kindly devoted his precious time to the supervision of this work. His rich and constructive remarks brought this thesis to its present appearance.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Jacques BACAMURWANKO who first introduced me to academic research, and who, despite his many obligations proved to be preciously helpful to the writing of this thesis. I inherited from him my thirst for scholarship.

Then, my thanks go to Dr. Ismael R. MBISE, Senior Lecturer at the University of Dar-Es-Salaam. Dr. MBISE, your seriousness and academic sensibility really impressed me. You are a genuine authority on literature.

I would be really pleased if the teaching staff of the Department of English Language and Literature could see in these words the expression of my most sincere appreciation for all the good things they did during my four-year stay at the University of Burundi.

To you Mr. Ephrem NSHIMIRIMANA and your family. You have been the boss of all my studies. These modest pages are

wholeheartedly dedicated to you for your unfailing moral and financial support.

It would be a sin not to express my deepest admiration to Mr. and Mrs. Gervais HAVYARIMANA and their family. These words seem to me too weak to express how I really feel for you, for the wonderful things you granted me. Without your exemplary kindness, and sense of parenthood, I would not have completed my last year or written this thesis.

I especially express my gratitude to Dr. Aloys KAMURAGIYE and his family for their unfailing assistance in hard times.

May all my friends--Chomsky, Vincent, Jeanne, Sylvain, Josée, Spès and ADIHA--see this thesis as the crowning of our true friendship.

To Devote NGABIRANO who taught me my first course in literature, to my classmates and to all of you who, in one way or another, have contributed to my studies, I humbly say:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH INDEED

Celestin WAKARERWA.

Love is never any better than the lover.
Wicked people love wickedly, violent people
love violently, weak people love weakly,
stupid people love stupidly, but love of
a free man is never safe. There is no gift
for the beloved. The lover alone possesses
his gift of love.

Toni MORRISON: *The Bluest Eye*.

C O N T E N T S

Introduction..... 4

Chapter I: Class Distinction and Afro-American Women's Literature.....14

Chapter II : From Fragile Harmony to Chaos.....38

Chapter III: Women's Failure to Achieve Identity.....68

Conclusion.....87

Bibliography.....91

INTRODUCTION.

During the women's liberation movement of the 1960s, the word sexism was coined by analogy with racism. The term now is in widespread use in political and social sciences, literature and criticism. In the USA where the feminist movement was most developed, racial discrimination showed that all women are not the same, and therefore should not have the same battlefields while struggling against oppression, although they agreed that male domination was achieved, partially, by silencing women, and that women's anger must be voiced to the whole humanity.

This paper aims at studying the two notions of racism and sexism in a multiracial setting as it is portrayed by one of the foremost Afro-American novelists, Toni Morrison, in her novel *Tar Baby* (1981). But to begin with, a few words are needed about the essential meaning of sexism. Women's struggle for equality among the sexes is their struggle against men's endeavor to control everything which causes them to victimize women. Realizing that the best way to attain and keep their privileges is by keeping women down, men convinced women that they neither needed nor could control power. This process of brainwashing is the core of sexism. It consists in a range of attitudes, beliefs, policies, practices and laws discriminating against people on the basis of gender. However, although men can be discriminated against, this is usually referred to as 'reverse sexism' or 'inverse sexism,' as Lisa Tuttle (1986) says, being a response to sexism victimizing women.

She defines sexism as:

The system and practice of discriminating against a person on the ground of sex. Specially it refers to

unfair prejudice against women, stereotyping of women in regard to the sexual availability and attractiveness to men (objectification), and all conscious/unconscious assumptions which cause women to be treated as not fully human, while men are identified as the norm. (292)

It is men's assumption that biological differences make women inherently inferior human beings, as Audre Lorde (1984) defines it by analogy with racism: "The belief in the inherent superiority of one sex and thereby the right to dominance" (45). One of the most oppressive and dismissive manifestations of sexism is assigning women to their homes, because the world belongs to men who view women as unable to do things on their own. Men developed the argument that what women need are men who can show them that they are powerful, and create in them a sense of fulfillment in being possessed. This resulted in women's lack of self-confidence in everything. Men built on an "eroticized image of women," making them objects of male sexual desire, and omitting them from the dominant discourse. Women were defined in terms of the male norm. As Vicky Randall (1987) puts it:

Women [are omitted] as subject matters, although they may be subsumed under such generalities as "humanity," "mankind," or "man;" second, . . . women [are discussed only] . . . in terms of their significance for men rather than in their own right.

(2)

Since the strategies and purpose of oppression are the same for all the men, women could be viewed globally as "sisters," in the belief that women are the same all over the world. The

Encyclopedia Americana (1982) advances the idea that "sex-role stereotypes," i.e., "that each sex has distinct characteristics that condition a person of either sex to behave in a certain way" (545h), are along with the belief in men's superiority to women, the most compelling component of sexism. According to the encyclopedia, there is a socialization process, by which children are taught what and how to believe, essentially "sex-typed behavior" and "sex-role specialization." By the same process, girls are taught to be attractive to boys above other individual success values such as athletics or academics.

This is what feminism combats. The feminist movement, though it formally began in the middle of the nineteenth century, it reached its peak in the 1960s. Two of the major activities it undertook are first, intense consciousness-raising activity, and then, political activism aimed at raising women's status in every aspect of social and political life. Feminists fight the "good" quality assigned to them by men, because it is a falsification of the truth, insofar as it applies to women willing to be sacrificed by men for their egoistic interests. Feminists struggle to change the view of women as "sexual human beings."

However, as Vicky Randall argues in *Women and Politics: An International Perspective* (1987), this idea of sisterhood has been challenged, especially by the women from third world countries and by minorities in Western countries,

for a presumed "universalism" which fails to recognise the variety of forms women's oppression can take and specifically for white women's connivance in racist attitudes and policies, toward their supposed sisters. (9)

Black American women in particular developed a feminism associating racism and sexism as the targets of their anger. There is among Afro-American feminists an urgent call to break with the generalized ideas, in search of an assertion of their identity as women and blacks. They find a need to recognize a different cultural identity. Literature endorsed this orientation, and its current trend is that

in order to envisage strategies for change, black feminism needs to break more conclusively with separatist and ahistorical essentialist theories of language and subjectivity. (Besley and Moore 17)

Therefore Afro-American women reject their alliance with white women, because "they were made to feel they were selling out their people by joining the white movement," as Tuttle (1986) says. In Toni Morrison's words:

Too many movements and organizations have made deliberate overtures to enrol blacks and have ended up by rotting them. They don't want to be used again to help somebody gain power--a power that is carefully kept out of their hand.

(Tuttle 42)

Their common belief is that racism and sexism must be overcome at the same time because they cannot favor one kind of oppression over another.

In literature and criticism, Afro-American feminists denounce patriarchy and oppression and study Afro-American women's writings. By setting bare black men's abuse they arouse fury from men, but it does not stop an increased portrayal of black males as oppressors.

SUMMARY

The "Tar Baby" is a young lady called Jadine Childs, aged twenty-six, orphaned when she was twelve. She is the niece of Sydney and Ondine Childs, a couple of black servants for a retired White confection executive, Valerian Street and his wife Margaret. The two masters have one Son, Michael, living in the States, while they have moved to a Caribbean Island--Isle des Chevaliers.

Valerian decided to retire very early and bought the island "almost for nothing" where he built a mansion, l'Arbe de la Croix, and sold some plots to other white folks. He divorced his first wife and spent many years alone before marrying Miss Maine, a seventeen-year old high school graduate, who does not enjoy her marriage. In fact, Valerian--actually named after the Roman emperor Valerian (253AD)--wants to be like God on his estate. He acts like a colonial power, dictating his rule over everything and everyone. Margaret is "governed" along with the others, and she is hardly distinguished from the black servants as the master's wife.

Valerian has built a greenhouse where he spends all of his time and appears to love it above everything. His servants, who have been at his side for more than thirty years are very obedient. As for Jadine, she has graduated from the Sorbonne in Paris, where she has enjoyed a happy life as a model. Now she is back in Isle des Chevaliers on vacation.

Tar Baby opens with a man jumping from a ship and swimming to the shore. The story moves to L'Arbe de la Croix where the

family, with the servants apparently well integrated, are preparing for Christmas. Life runs a very normal course, apart from Valerian's repeated attacks on Margaret. Soon, Ondine notices that chocolate and Evians disappear, but they cannot guess who takes them. There, Jadine is enjoying a self-centered life until the day when Margaret finds a man hiding in her closet. After a dinner, when Margaret goes to her room, she comes out crying, unable to tell clearly what happened. But although Valerian dismisses her, as he has always done, saying that it is because she is drunk, Sydney goes to check in her closet and brings out the man, whose name is Son.

When Valerian sees him, he invites him to have a drink, thereby upsetting all the household. He befriends Son who begins his extended stay at L'Arbe de la Croix. Everybody else is yearning for the time Valerian will get rid of him, which puts them in a state of disarray that Valerian enjoys very much. Margaret's shock is so strong that she just retires into her room in order not to hear of Son or Valerian again. She cannot figure out what has happened to him to cause him to humiliate her to such a point.

Son seems to know very much about the household since he has been loitering there, popping in and out of the house and stealing food and water for a week before being caught. That is why he remains serene and even dismissive towards them. He is attracted to Jadine and when he proposes going to the beach, she surprisingly agrees. Little by little, people in the household learn to accept Son. At the same time, Valerian seems to have lost interest in what is happening at his home, whereas Jadine,

who was in the beginning terrified by Son's wild look, now feels dangerously attracted to him.

A very serious incident happens one night when Valerian announces that he has fired Gideon and Thérèse, a couple of blacks working there and helping Sydney and Ondine very much. He argues that he caught them stealing apples. Sydney and Ondine are outraged and revolted; they ask for more clarification. In fact, Son was a thief and was let in, they say. The narrator even comments on Valerian and his people's theft and excessively disguised tokenism as follows:

He dismissed them with a flutter of the finger, because they were thieves, and nobody knew thieves and thievery better than he did and he probably thought he was a law-abiding man, they all did, and they always did, because they had not the dignity of wild animals who did not eat where they defecated but they could defecate over a whole people and come there to live and defecate some more by tearing up the land and that is why they loved property so, because they had killed it, soiled it defecated on it and they loved more than anything the places where they shit. (203)

Sydney and Ondine, who have been showing understanding, now cannot help challenging him. They attack Valerian for his irresponsibility. But Valerian maintains his godlike air, and cannot think of backing down. The turmoil results in Ondine fighting Margaret after Valerian has announced their dismissal, although "it was the second time he ordered a dismissal and the second time it held no force" (201). Valerian, whose health is

waning is unable to separate them, but Jadine and Son manage to get them apart.

Since she has nothing more to safeguard, Ondine reveals the secret she has been keeping about Margaret, that she had witnessed her sticking pins in baby Michael and burning him with cigarettes. The news overwhelms Valerian, and in this climate, "L'Arbe de la Croix became a house of shadows" (235).

Taking advantage of the turmoil, Son conquers Jadine, and within a very short period, everything is arranged for them to live together in New York. Their stay there is polished with a happy sexual life, but also with repeated bickering and taunting. When they go to Son's home village in Florida, Jadine feels the most uncomfortable, with loneliness and nightmares. They go back to New York but their relationships quickly deteriorate. Son wants to dominate her and to prove that his ideas of racial separation are the most reliable. He wants to teach her that she should never believe the white man, that she should conform to black people's "traditional" values, whereas she wants him to be more "civilized."

Jadine, who has adopted the dominant culture, rejects him and goes back to Paris via L'Arbe de la Croix, with hope that she will never see him again. Before leaving for Paris, Ondine tries to warn her about the risk she takes by minding a little about the black cultural values, but she mistakes her words and dismisses her outright.

As for Son, he cannot stand not being with her. So he sets off with a determination to find her at all costs. But Son's determination blinds him as the novel closes with him in the wilderness, running in no direction to find her.

OVERVIEW

To deal with racism and sexism as reflected in *Tar Baby*, this thesis is divided into three chapters. The rationale is twofold: it investigates race and sex relationships as viewed by Afro-American women writers, Morrison in particular; and second, it assesses *Tar Baby's* relevance in the framework of Afro-American feminist literature.

The first chapter, entitled "Class Distinction and Afro-American Women's Literature," gives a background to the Afro-American feminist literature by analyzing racism and sexism as lived by black women. This chapter shows how racism plays a key role in making the class distinctions that relegate blacks and whites to opposite ends. We also analyse black men's discrimination against black women, who are made to be an underclass. The chapter ends with an analysis of the Afro-American feminist movement's success both as a consciousness-raising movement, and a breeding-ground of interesting literary production.

The second chapter, "From Fragile Harmony to Chaos," focuses on *Tar Baby* as a world of dilemmas, both individual and intrapersonal, regulated by binary oppositions and oppression. Both the role of racism in defining people's life standards, and the compelling role of sexism which puts women at the mercy of men to the lowest strata of their society, regardless of their color are analysed. The chapter also discusses how silence and submission by the dominated are the only cues to guarantee a kind

of day-to-day life, which ends up in a chaotic turmoil because it has no real foundation.

The third chapter, "Women's Failure to Achieve Identity," analyses two types of reactions to sexism. First, the lack of self-confidence and determination, which results in humiliation and a lack of improvement; and second, determination for self-assertion and independence which enables a woman to resist men's oppression and construct an autonomous identity. This chapter assesses *Tar Baby's* relevance to the Afro-American feminist literature, as a novel where a black woman fails to understand the burden of racism whereas she is the one who is supposed to see clearly, and who becomes entrapped in the dominant white culture at the expense of her Afro-American cultural heritage, someone who

fears deeper bonding to the family and the responsibilities of womanhood/daughterhood since it may involve economic responsibility--or parenting Sydney and Ondine in their old age. Consequently, Jadine is incapable of being both *harbor and ship*.
(Reyes 25)

CHAPTER ICLASS DISTINCTION AND AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

Blacks in America have less access to power and wealth than whites and this is rooted in the very creation and building of the American nation. Slavery broke the negro¹ race, depriving it of possibilities for cohesion and identification as a people. Although it was abolished a long time ago, blacks suffered open racial discrimination for decades until the Civil Rights Upheavals of the 1960s. The aim of open racial discrimination was, as Ginette Castro (1990) says:

[doing] violence to the individuality of each black person, imposing upon him/her a process of acculturation and transforming the individual into "Uncle Tom" who is subject to the will of the white master, even to the point of adopting his values and stereotypes. (23)

They are thus forced to acknowledge their inferiority, and therefore to miss opportunities for self-realization. Nowadays, the racial premise remains one of the foremost elements molding different communities. It plays a key role in class distinction.

From the literary point of view, Afro-American novels portray class distinction on the same pattern. The white man is depicted on the top, having inherited all the advantages given by past political and economic systems. He is the center of the world, and sometimes uses any means within his reach to safeguard this prestigious position, and the racial discrimination may

¹Being conscious of the derogatory meaning the word NEGRO has come to acquire, it is used in this thesis as a historical reference.

serve both as his weapon and shield. The world therefore is understood as made up of whites on the one hand and blacks on the other, living in racial and class struggles. People are keenly identified first through the color line, and white, wealthy and oppressive is opposed to black, poor and oppressed.

In this respect, Afro-American writers feel at ease when creating the idea of community; when they emphasize family, ancestry, and friendship among other things. They portray racially defined spaces, where sometimes the place affects the character, as when a black community is confined to an area that the whites know they cannot use fruitfully. Those communities are therefore set outside the white world, i.e., living in a kind of isolation because there are no fair social contacts. In Toni Morrison's early novels for example, people live in racially defined areas, blacks living around the white societies.

In these writings, it appears that there is no consistent middle-class; those who have a fairly good standard of living do not feel it. This goes in the framework of acculturation mentioned above: people from what could be called the middle-class feel that it would be better if they looked like whites. Therefore, they do not want to identify with their people any more. It is a kind of self hatred that they do not transcend. They constitute what can be called a black "petite-bourgeoisie" against the working classes who find themselves, as Witney M. Young (1969) puts it, with "nothing ... to win an equal chance" (27).

To justify and/or strengthen their advantages, the white racists adopted a strategy that Herbert Aptheker (1971) calls "the myth of racism" in three points: first is the "Curse of Ham

Myth," which validates segregation using evidence from the Bible, thereby denying Afro-Americans' humanity. They were supposed to be held as beasts; but since the Negroes were clearly different from animals, tenants of the "idea of bestiality" took them as naturally inferior human beings.

The second is "The Scientific Myth" that took advantage of theories, especially Darwinism to justify the white man's advance and social injustice to name but a few. The "Scientific" theories helped sustain the myth of the negroes' biological inferiority, and therefore justify their subordination. Last, Aptheker talks about "The Curse of Nature" or "The Curse of Nurture," by which, with evidence of some sociological facts and statistics--under the guise of objective procedure--people concluded among other things that "the poor are poor because they are not good" (29), (poor meaning without money and without merit).

The black people failed to oppose this prejudice because they were unable to decide and enforce decisions in the interest of their whole community, being rare in national decision-making institutions. Moreover, as Young (1969) argues:

White people who were racist controlled and dominated our country, and white people who weren't overt racists were accessories to the fact through their silence, and through their failure to oppose injustice. (73)

It means that this kind of complicity by the moderate whites left the blacks completely defenseless, and this was for them a time of disillusionment. In time of slavery for example, Aptheker (1964) argues that blacks "were to learn that [even] many of the

Revolutionists who cried 'liberty, equality' meant to add 'for whites only,' and that some did not even mean that" (73-4).

This kind of racial oppression that the blacks suffered together boosted a kind of consciousness in them as a racial class, a state of being made up of a combination of both political and economic factors. In *Race, Class & the Apartheid State* (1988), Harold Wolpe explains class theories, saying that class and race are not mutually exclusive.

Wolpe gives two major perspectives on race and class (here implied the political and economic): first, when the political scene is shaped by conflicts within it, one can understand it in terms of classes, racial groups, etc., engaged in those conflicts, as well as in terms of their aim, which can be political, economic or even social. Second, when the social order is structured by race relations, other factors such as economy are neglected in the production of racial order. In other words, class conflicts and class consciousness are economic in case they relate to production, salaries, etc... Otherwise, if the political, the economic and the ideological combine to structure classes; race may be the very motivator of struggle.

This theory is very relevant to Afro-American women's literature. One may analyse a few novels to see how blacks are depicted. To begin with, Toni Morrison portrays a place called the Bottom in *Sula* (1973). It is a place located up in the hills that a white man gives to a black for his achievements. Having promised him a plot in the bottom (the valley), the white man finds it too valuable to be given to a black man. Therefore, he invents a trick to explain to him that the hills are the bottom

of the heaven. The place nevertheless becomes a pole of attraction for the negroes.

Similarly, Gloria Naylor depicts Brewster Place in *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), which is, in the words of Barbara Christian (1990), "the last stop of the road to the bottom in the American society, where you live when you can't live anywhere else" (349). In her second novel, *Linden Hills* (1985), Linden Hills is a self-enclosed V-shaped land, and the V-shape helps to control people coming in, the same for Brewster Place; a wall is built there to keep them away from the civilized white world. What is portrayed is what Young terms "an economic disaster area." Linden Hills, which looks like a middle-class community is simply a group of houses that have never achieved unity. Though it appears to the outside as the sign of the blacks' achievement, it has been rotting from the inside and has been on the verge of collapse for a long time. Paradoxically, Brewster Place, which is a sign of the blacks' failure, is held together by women as a united community. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), it even appears that there are class distinctions in the black community. Wolpe (1980) explains such a phenomenon as follows:

Opposition to racial domination may tend to unite black people across color lines and, yet, specifically defined class interests may at the same time tend to divide them along class lines. (52)

Classes therefore appear "not as unified social forces, but as patchworks or segments which are differentiated and divided a variety of bases and by varied processes" (51). In this respect, it is not only color that assigns people to such or s

a position. Gender also puts the male in a more comfortable position than the female. This phenomenon, too, is much discussed in literature by women. Here we limit ourselves to the Afro-American field.

It appears that though they share a lot, Afro-American men and women do not have the same focus, depending on the sources of their problems. As Noel A. Cazenave (1981) argues:

Black men are generally assumed to be afflicted with two severe handicaps at birth: race and class. However, it is often assumed that gender is an important advantage that guarantees black men a modicum of relief from the toils of oppression (even if it is at the expense of black women). (177)

It means that black women also have to endure sexism from their male counterparts. The latter get relief by dominating their women under various angles, on the basis that they are the weaker sex.

Therefore, the two groups do not have the same battleground in the fight against oppression. Their views are even sometimes conflicting, especially when black women decide to talk about the black man, in reaction to sexism, men often say women are giving a "damning view of black men," or "sowing seeds of division in the black community." Afro-American women, especially since the 1970s, have developed a very successful literature, different in emphasis from what black men have written. The male writers talk about the "black man"--man standing for the whole race, but black women show how they have been misrepresented or even excluded by the former. The major women writers from the 1970s on--forming the Afro-American women's feminist movement or the Womanist

Movement--by emphasizing the identity of the black woman herself, add a new dimension to the already shown human relationships. They show the links between race, class and sex: between blacks and whites, between black women and men, and between the rich and the poor.

Race ascribes the women to the lowest rank as blacks, but worse, gender makes of them the most miserable social group as black women. They endure racism and sexism equally, the reason why in their writing the black male is often subject to their attacks, as they denounce oppression, men's inhumane treatment of the black women which tends to make them an underclass.

Alice Walker dramatizes this by her portrayal of Celie in *The Color Purple* (1982), a Southern adolescent girl who is sexually abused both by black and white men. She gives the image of a miserable fourteen-year-old lady faced with her insensitive foster father who rapes her while his wife recovers from childbirth. She cries out her pain, but he cynically tells her, "You better shut up and git used to it" (1).

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove is apparently assaulted by her father. She also suffers from self-hatred as one of the consequences of racism; convinced that the only valid standard of physical beauty is the white one, She craves blue eyes until she becomes insane.

In sum, the black woman finds herself having no place whatsoever in America. She is doubly an outsider in her own land, because she fails to meet the requirements of what Audre Lorde calls "a mythical norm," usually defined as "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure" (116).

The black woman is therefore totally angry and when she speaks, she does all she can to tell what it is to be black and female in racist and sexist America. She reacts against the white world which tragically tries to annihilate them as a race or impose its values on them, but especially against the black man's discrimination which sometimes is worse than racism itself. Hence the apparently anti-black man which characterizes her writing. In their self-defense against the black man's evil, black women talk essentially about their lives and experiences, for nobody has ever talked about them properly before. Washington (1990) identifies this as the foremost element that distinguishes black women's literature from the others:

Their literature is about black women; it takes their trouble to record the thoughts, words, feelings and deeds of black women, experiences that make the reality of being black in America look very different from what men have written. (35)

The black man has distorted the image of the black race, because by trying to proclaim himself its sole representative and mouthpiece, he has deprived the audience of a very important contribution. In real life, the man has long assigned the woman to the role of childbearing and household activities, considering himself as the only one capable of saving the negro race from the woes it endured. Women were not relevant in any case. Mc Dowell refers to this as men being "self" and women "other" and, in the words of Washington, "for some mysterious reason, writing about black women is not considered as racially significant as writing about black men" (33).

The origin of this situation is in the history of man-woman relationships. The Afro-American woman has been subjected to whipping, rape, incest, and this silencing helped strengthen the patriarchal tradition. (It is interesting to note that nowadays due to the frequent absence of the husbands, black women often find themselves on top of their families, and that therefore matriarchy has become the general rule in Afro-American families). There was a kind of order of discourse established in which she had no turn: first the white man talks/writes about himself as the governor of the universe; then the white woman about the white man as her closest and her husband. The black man talks about the white man as his oppressor, and in a sense, his model. And the silent black woman has been almost absent in literature, both as a writer and as a subject for writers. She was victim of contempt and oblivion.

For example, in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), black men talk about the black woman, saying "Uh woman by herself is uh pitiful thing. Dey needs aid and assistance," or "Ah never married her for nothing lak [delivering speeches]. She's uh woman and her place is in de home." And the book itself, which remains fascinating both to scholars and readers today, was attacked by Richard Wright when it was first published, as a novel with no message and no theme. Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953) suffered a similar dismissal.

Usually, black women's works were said to be singular and not universal in style and theme, and this somehow confirmed the controversial belief that a black woman as a writer or a subject for writing was not as significant as a black man. Brooks' novel

dealing with the up-to-date theme of the quest for identity in a racist and sexist world did not receive the audience it deserved. Critical reviews were, as Mary Helen Washington says, "condescending and dismissive Had *Maud Martha* been written by a man about a man's experience, it would have been considered a brilliant modernist text" (31).

Women were discriminated against at all levels. In the nineteenth century, when great black scholars created the Talented Tenth, whose goal was to establish humane and positive images of blacks, they decided that it be open only to "*men* of African descent," for as one of them said, "literary matters and social matters do not mix" (Washington 33). Sexism among scholars highlights how deeply rooted prejudice against women is and also the place given to them. It is self-understood that the man can do everything while the woman's role is socially restricted to childbearing and housekeeping.

Black men have seen the black woman as a nuisance. The former's primary concern in fiction was the oppression by the American society; they excluded black women from asserting their rights as people, and it is rare that a good woman is portrayed in their writings. She is rather shown as being able to do evil such as castration, symbolically depriving them of their traditional breadwinning role when she succeeds economically in the white world.

To try to safeguard their perilous position, they avoided dialog with women by silencing them. One of the strategies they used, according to Audre Lorde, was to blame the victim for her victimization: "Black women are said to invite rape and murder and abuse by not being submissive enough, or by being too

seductive, or too . . ." (61). They have sought to fully control them. Women have only been acknowledged for their sexuality--a way to legitimize rape and incest. Men's endeavor to tame the black women has been the source of a binary opposition between their lives. In many cases therefore, as in *Sula*, marriage is seen by Afro-American feminist writers as the death of the woman's identity and imagination. That is why Sula prefers to live freely and have sex when and with whom she wants, without being subjecting herself to any male desire. Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* experiences among other things the evil side of marriage when she wanders from man to man searching for love on her own terms. On their part, women view sex in many of their writings as a marital duty, to quench men's lust.

Such a consideration is in itself a degradation of women, similar to "the idea of bestiality" referred to above. Maya Angelou makes an acute comment on this when she compares marriage with prostitution:

there are married women who are more whorish than a street prostitute because they have sold their bodies for marriage licenses, and there are some women who sleep with men for money who have great integrity because they are doing it for a purpose (Bloom 7).

Angelou's words are a sound invitation to women's free will, and the answer to such an idea in reaction to marriage and black male sexism has at last come as they tend to reject the black man in all his attempts at domination. They prefer to remain single rather than seek out a marriage that undermines them. It may explain the fact that a large number of black children are born

to single parents; fifty percent according to recent U.S. Government statistics (Johnson 9). But, however, the fact that half of them are born to teenagers raises doubts about men's responsibility toward younger generations.

When the black man's self is undermined by the white man, either through physical or psychological violence, he looks for a scapegoat in turn. And since there is no one else at his hand but the black woman, she becomes his victim. She is dehumanized. The dilemma of women in a patriarchal society is parallel to that of blacks in a racist one.

There is also a cultural reason for oppression, as the society has assigned the man the role of heading it. Cazenave argues that "Traditionally, femininity in America has been associated with passivity, and masculinity, prescribed activity" (174). Women are then likely to have attributed to them all these negative qualifications in order to justify the black men's abuses. However, the men often fail to satisfy their families' needs and leave everything to their wives. Faced with failure, since they cannot make themselves respected by their families, and unless they can impress them, violence and oppression remain the only means available to achieve their desired ends.

As Noel A Cazenave puts it,

A lower-class man may feel that since he cannot coerce or impress his family with his social status, education, money, prestige or other attributes, the only way for him to maintain his position as "head of the family" is through the use of his superior physical force--the only resource he sees as operating effectively for him. (181)

But apart from this frustration-motivated oppression, tradition in the Afro-American community legitimizes whipping and dominating wives as a sign of masculinity. Hurston shows it in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* when Tea Cake, though he loves Janie very much, beats her to show the other men that he has authority.

In their reaction to discrimination, Afro-American women develop among other things a particular kind of feminism, aimed at facing the white man's racism and sexism, the white woman's patronizing attitudes and the black man's sexism and lack of understanding altogether. Because being spoken for has turned out to be the best way to be misrepresented and ignored, they decide to speak for themselves. Their writing is self-centered, giving an original black woman's understanding of the world that, in their belief, has been distorted. They aim at correcting past errors, accusing the black man of having favored racism over sexism, seeming thereby to have misunderstood his aim of struggle, something that arouses fury among many male writers. Mel Watkins discusses this controversy, quoting the male writer Calvin Hernton:

Black men accuse the women of sowing seeds of "division" in the black community In other words, when the women tell the truth about men and refuse to accept the blame for what men have done to them, the men get mad as hell. (36)

In their view, racism and sexism cannot be separated; otherwise, struggling would be a loss of time. While all women share a common oppressor as women, the white woman is oppressive in turn on the basis of her color and class differences, or has a simplistic view when she thinks that what she claims necessarily

goes for the black women. Thus their struggle cannot have the same emphasis. As Audre Lorde puts it, "black feminism is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as black women" (60). The feminist literature that has flourished over the last two decades has dealt at large with those legitimate issues Lorde talks about, and Toni Morrison played a key role in the movement both as a novelist and as an editor at Random House. Among the great figures are Alice Walker, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara and Gloria Naylor. But besides Morrison, Alice Walker is the one who spearheaded the movement. Its purpose is to break the "conventional image" of the woman, bringing an active woman, capable of good and evil, failure and success, face to face with the reality offered by her society. The feminist perspective, they think, is the best way to understand both the black man under patriarchy and the black woman in her process of change.

In their writing, characters are essentially women whose sense of individuality is spoiled by the traditional stereotypes against them, the white man's abuse and finally the black man's deliberate oppression. Their attempt to give the image of the black woman in many faces is essentially threefold. First, the purpose is to define her, i.e., to tell the story of the black woman's past, all the factors that contributed to making her what she is. The second purpose is to advocate her cause in shattering the ideas behind her oppression. It is, as a matter of fact, an egalitarian attitude that they oppose to discrimination, showing that no individual whether black or white, man or woman is superior to another by virtue of nature, that what counts for

each other is what he or she does to distinguish him/herself from others. Lastly, Afro-American feminist literature sings the merits and values of the black woman; her beauty, her motherhood, her endurance, her power; it also confirms her will and determination to recover her selfhood.

They cover a wide range of topics, but the assertion that they are neither merely sexual creatures, nor the weakest human beings in America, who therefore need to be taken care of and owned by the black men, but as individuals endowed with integrity as well as beauty, strength and love is the cornerstone.

It is a way to sever themselves from the black male's view of the world in order to write an original literature, speaking about their own concerns--and the general concerns--in their own terms. Taking the example of Maya Angelou's autobiographies, her stance is that black women have got to live the way they please. She gives a detailed account of her own eventful life, a life rich with violence, rape, prostitution, racism, to name but a few woes that she among many Afro-American women have experienced or are likely to, setting bare their troubled life that they must transcend anyway. Angelou demonstrates that black women will survive even under adverse circumstances. She suggests that they aim at "being the best" in everything. Angelou sings female qualities, and especially claims the right to use one's body the way one pleases, despite people's attempts to impose limitations on it.

By detailing a pattern of interrelationships between racism, class and sexism in America, Afro-American feminists have generated a constant new feminist-oriented readership, kept together by their serious and varied literary creativity. The

black literary scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1990) contends that:

Contemporary black women have generated collectively a loyal and devoted readership more cosmopolitan and integrated (by race and gender) than the customary market of black male writing has been. (2)

Their purpose can be said to be the search for and validation of a tradition. They first sought to revalue their predecessors long unaccounted for, such as Zora Neale Hurston and Phillis Wheatley. Alice Walker was particularly outraged by the fact that

The majority of women who tried to express themselves by writing and who tried to make a living by doing so, died in obscurity and poverty before their time. (*Our Mother's Gardens* 35)

She gives examples of Wheatley, who died of malnutrition while she was working as a drudge; Nella Larsen who finally gave up writing to die in complete obscurity, working as a nurse to make ends meet. Hurston, too, died in poverty in a welfare home after working several years as a housemaid.

Walker well succeeded in this process of the rehabilitation of her "ancestors," both in words and in actions. She sought the unmarked grave of Hurston and she paid for a marker to pay her the honor she deserved. In her essay "In search of Our Mothers' Gardens", (1985). she first discusses Jean Toomer's novel *Cane* in which black women are "unaware of the richness they held," but hopeless and abused sexual objects. These women are depicted, stumbling" blindly through their lives: creatures so abused and

mutilated in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, that they consider themselves unworthy even of hope" (2374). She refers back to Phillis Wheatley and praises the Afro-American mothers' richness: their "often mutilated but vibrant creative spirit that the black mother has inherited" (2379). Walker then outcries the black mother's lifelong suffering due to racism and sexism which blind people or urge them to shut their eyes before the mother's "garden."

According to Walker, black mothers have stunning skill at work and it is hard not to admire what they produce: "people drive by our house in Georgia--perfect strangers and imperfect strangers--and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art " (2381). The black mother turns whatever plot she gets, even a rock, into a garden. This capacity is her originality, because no one else can create such a garden," so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity" (2381). The essay has become indispensable reading for all feminist writers.

Alice Walker began her career as a novelist with *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), a novel in which female characters like Men Copeland are victims of the way tradition taught them to consider men or women; they fail to overturn or oppose those traditional stereotypes, but they happen to learn that responsibility for one's actions is the best way to gain esteem and self-respect. In her second novel, *Meridian* (1976), She portrays a female civil rights advocate who rejects what her mother--society--expects from her: to be an obedient woman. In this respect, the novel is a critique of motherhood as the basic definition of women. *Meridian* prefers to stand her ground alone

instead of following what is pre-established. First politically, she willingly fails to meet with the expectation that she submits herself to patriarchal discourse, refusing to speak when asked whether she could kill another human being in the name of the revolution. Second, socially after Meridian is expelled from her group, she has a baby at seventeen and courageously drops it, her family and friends to resist the quality of "happy mother" she is given. She wants to be a revolutionary woman, and she realizes that she cannot reach her goal when she remains under the burden of her racist and sexist society. That is why she must learn to value her own life against the society's deadly restrictions.

Walker's characterization of Meridian is in effect a device suggesting "struggle for personal transformation as an alternative to the political movement of the 1960s" (Pifer 77).

She culminates in *The Color Purple* (1982), a novel of psychological growth, where Walker uses an epistolary structure--the first in the Afro-American novel. The novel is said by some critics to be a model in the new trends of the black feminist literary tradition. It is about a teenager, Celie, living in frustration, who assumes that her life story is so dark that she cannot tell it to anyone else but God. She then writes him letters recounting her life, but soon she discovers that even God is not listening to her. She decides to shift and write to her sister Nettie though she does not know her whereabouts, because of her husband that she even refuses to name, Mr. ____, who stores all her letters. Although Celie's sexual experience begins with rape, she later discovers the importance of healthy sexuality, especially through her lesbian relationship with a powerful woman called Shug Avery, who in the long run helps her build up her

self-esteem and creativity. Walker depicts a young girl who contrives to overcome the cruel fate her racist and sexist society has allotted her.

Alice Walker and Toni Morrison meet in many aspects of their writing. They are all committed to write "black literature," sound enough to confirm their racial and cultural vitality as a people, complete and proud of its values. This aspect is proven by Morrison's theme of quest for ancestry in *Song of Solomon*, and Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, and also the significance of her rehabilitation of Zora Neale Hurston. Walker also reaches in Africa in *The Color Purple*, where a character gives an account of everyday life there as a lived experience. Africa is also referred to by Morrison in *Song of Solomon*, as well as in *Tar Baby*, here in the image of a young lady of transcendent beauty that Jadine meets in Paris.

Both of them challenge the false male consciousness, demonstrating that the black man has been individualist in his writing, and oppressive. They therefore emphasize, like all the feminist writers, the priority for life. In sum, the two leading feminists have the same battleground. Issues of everyday life as lived by the Afro-American female, limiting her self-realization such as rape, marriage, the father's inadequacies, are equally discussed, though sometimes differently as far as narrative strategies are concerned.

Morrison, however, is a special authority on the Womanist Movement. By publishing brilliant writers such as T.C. Bambara, Gayle Jones and Angela Davis, and by her own successful writing, she inspired many young writers:

[She] demonstrated to publishing houses that a

new and identifiable readership eager for a "woman-oriented" content would handily sustain even more publications by black women, Gates says, adding that "her productivity, vision and craft established the [Afro-American women's feminist] movement's pace" (3). She has proved to be a great stylist, and with her female characters, she gives a comprehensive portrait of what it is to be a black woman in America. She explores one of the consequences of racism we discussed earlier, i.e., self-hatred in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, about a young girl growing up in a cursed family. Pecola feels that the only way to be loved is to have blue eyes--in a sense, to be white. Moreover, she is victim of incest like Celie, but unlike her, she does not succeed in her quest for self-realization. On the other hand, missing blue eyes makes her mentally insane. In this novel, Morrison analyzes the concept of black family from the eyes of a young girl from a fairly rich family, talking about a family of the nobodies, where the man, Cholly Breedlove cannot get money to satisfy his wife's ambitions.

The concept is discussed again in her subsequent novels; in *Sula*, we have black women facing the heavy burden of responsibility as heads of families. Whereas Sula lives the tensions between her, in search^{of} self and her community, rejecting thereby maternity in favor of a free sexuality, her grandmother, Eva reportedly goes up to sacrificin^g her body slipping her leg under a train to collect insurance money for her family to live on. Eva is duplicated by Sethe in Morrison's last but one novel to date, *Beloved* (1987). Being herself an ex-slave, Sethe feels the need to protect her children against falling back into

slavery. She would rather kill them, an action for which she pays a heavy price when the killed child, Beloved, comes back to her again in the form of a lovely teenager, causing her lover Paul D to run away. Paul D flees as many other black men do in Afro-American women's novels, having been unable to honor his duty as the head of the family. He becomes, in Mel Watkin's Words, another one of the "thieves, sadists, rapists and ne'er-do-wells" (35).

Nearly all Morrison's novels are set in rural American black communities. Her fourth novel, *Tar Baby*, however, unlike the Afro-American novels, has a completely different setting. The story takes place essentially on a Caribbean island, in a retired white millionaire's household. What separates *Tar Baby* from other writings is its multiracial and international setting. According to Susan L. Blake (1984), the novel is an allegory of colonialism based on the Joel Chandler Harris tale of the "Tar Baby".

The novel gives a new dimension to the literary field by its attempt to portray blacks and whites living under the same roof. This helps give a close analysis of people's possible relationships in a racist and sexist environment. The novel sets bare the racial premise as an underlying factor of blacks and whites' social interactions. The novel has a broader scope because at the same time it deals with white sexism, black sexism, both of which are aimed at silencing women. The white woman, Margaret is a weak character the victim of her husband's insensitivity. She is even too weak face to Ondine, the black woman servant. The latter therefore takes advantage of her, in a sense, helping Valerian to keep her down. Morrison generalizes

this state of things in her interview with Charles Ruas (1984) as follows:

It's my view that one of the things that black women were able to do in many situations was to make it possible for white women to remain infantile . . . in a sense, such women are not innocent, but they really are victims of a kind of giant romantic stupidity. (222)

Ondine and her husband know that they are quite limited as far as social mobility is concerned. As for their niece, Jadine, she is uprooted by Valerian's faked sympathy, because although she has had a good education, she has nowhere where she really belongs. She craves the "white thing," but the white society will have nothing to do with her. As for the black community, they think she should think twice before she drops her black heritage. It is in the situation created by this double rejection wherein lies the major conflict of the novel, from which one sees clearly about what really was going on in each individual's psyche, behind a long silence and would-be understanding: the white master thinks his supremacy is not questionable, and that the blacks make an underclass, whereas the blacks think they are extremely useful to him. *Tar Baby's* conflict around Jadine follows the general trend of the Afro-American novel in which, as Barbara Christian notes, "When class distinctions are commented on, . . . they are located in the conflict between . . . [a character featured as having a black middle-class look] and others, on the price he pays for social mobility" (349). What one notices in the end is that social mobility is a complex thing because it creates alienation and ostracism.

All in all, Afro-American women live a complex experience, under the multiple oppression of race, class and gender. It would be an oversimplification to say that in addition to racism black women have had to confront sexism. Instead, it is more decisive to argue that issues of class, race and gender act upon each other dynamically. Afro-American women's literature deals at large with these issues, as if their motto is "to combat whatever kind of oppression they face together."

The Afro-American women's novel portrays black lower-class community hardship in a racist world, but much attention is also devoted to the woes of women in the community and to suggesting ways of achieving self-realization. In this chapter, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have been discussed as leading figures in this type of literature. In theme and narrative strategies, it appears that through their similarities the two novelists reflect what other black women discuss: black-white racial contacts (within a capitalist society); society and self; importance of self-expression; sexuality; marriage; husband's inadequacies; and especially the nameless cruelties of traditional patriarchy enforced through sexual stereotypes that offer them to repeated manipulations, as everybody is in position to give them orders: the white woman, the white child, the white man and the black man all have an ascendancy.

The novels portray heroines as struggling against complex handicaps due to class, race and gender. Some fight courageously by asserting their human rights. They therefore tell the men that they are the same, whereas others take a psychological ascent to the state of stubborn commitment to snatch their complete

independence. This kind of determination is what *Tar Baby's* heroine experiences.

CHAPTER IIFROM FRAGILE HARMONY TO CHAOS

In the previous chapter we saw that racism plays a decisive role as a regulator of people's standards of life, and that it can corrupt its victims, forging in them an ardent spirit of the predominant white civilization, at the expense of their own cultural and individual values. Sexism, too, duplicates some of the results of racism, insofar as it makes its sufferers second or third-class citizens.

In her novels, Morrison criticizes the dualism that results from a world view narrowed by racism and sexism, in which the strong, i.e., the "self" is valued against the weak, i.e., the "other." Morrison skillfully achieves this in depicting social, intra- and interpersonal dilemmas related to the two notions. *The Bluest Eye* deals with the self and society dilemma; *Song of Solomon*, the material and family value dilemma, whereas independence and womanliness is depicted in *Sula* (Blake 196). *Tar Baby* is a compilation of the three types of dilemmas, in which Toni Morrison makes a serious criticism of the Edenic myth, recasting "the Genesis story in such a way that its dualism is upset and its moral absolutes evaporate" (Lepow 365).

Tar Baby portrays blacks and whites living together in a white-created microcosm, where the cohabitation does not seem at first glance full of conflict. However, it is revealed how among the relationships there is a pattern of mutual oppositions, centered around racism and sexism. The man, on top, is a God-like conqueror, the offspring of a conquering race. From the outset, the white man is portrayed as an extremely destructive force

which undermines both people and nature. The narrator gives a foretaste of the general climate in which the story is set, i.e., however beautiful the environment may look, it was fashioned by the white man out of the destruction of another. It is "the end of the world" where he has unfrozen huge amounts of money to kill the natural beauty of the lush forest where everything was strictly regulated by nature, until the day "when laborers imported from Haiti came to clear the land, clouds and fish were convinced that the world was over It took the river to persuade them that indeed the world was altered" (9). In all his actions, man is angrily watched by impotent nature. Being the "creator," the master does not accept any order of things but his own.

It appears that at his home, l'Arbe de la Croix, silence and surrender are the most effective strategies for fighting domination. Everyone then has an internal conflict that is hardly revealed to others. Indeed, the characters prefer hiding through silence. They thus attempt to avoid facing the controversies which result from binary oppositions among their different categories. As Reyes puts it, "these five people go about the mansion with . . . their hypocritical performance of ritualistic ease, and prescribed roles" (23), incubating hereby the resultant chaos.

To begin with, Valerian Street is a master with a very complex personality. From youth, he displays strangeness, an example of which is his not being pleased by inheriting his position as a confection industry executive. That is why he decides to fight for his retirement: "when he was thirty-nine, he swore that he would quit at exactly sixty-five" (50), and then he

keenly prepared for it, creating at the same time his own world. Valerian tries to be God. He creates things and, like God, does not need to explain his actions. As god created "in his own image," Valerian, too, is surrounded by a world in his own image and of his own making. In fact, when he first sees Margaret, "she was so young and so unexpectedly pretty [that] he swallowed air, and had a coughing fit. She was all red and white like Valerians" (51), (the candy he had named after himself). By marrying Margaret, he creates a family and has a son who, too, looks like him. If God took a bit of clay and molded some creatures to which he breathed life, Valerian too tries to do the same to the people in his vicinity. The Valerians

had taken a little bit of sugar and a little bit of cocoa and made a good living for themselves and ninety others, and the people who lived in the factory neighborhood stayed there and loved it there largely because of the marvelous candy odor that greeted them in morning and bid them goodnight. (52)

Valerian, in need of servants, hired Sydney and Ondine who would always be under his direct rule and that is why when he moves to his estate in the Caribbean, they move too. Valerian's new home is a home of extravagance, where Margaret finds "too much light. Too much shadow. Too much foliage and much too much sleep" (68). And he completes his "week" creating a civilized wildlife and the "Tar Baby." Having chosen his plot higher on the island, he sells plot by plot to white men in need, provided they are kept out of his direct sight. He enjoys his creativity in a greenhouse he builds, where he forces plants to be what he wants

them to be, and he relaxes alone because he does not want anyone close to him--he wants no equal.

His providence regulates life on his estate for, to live with him, his household must bind to his rule. His wife and his servants are treated alike and in his eyes all blacks are the same. As Lauren Lepow sums it up, "at first seeming a godlike controller of others' destinies, Valerian Street . . . presides over his 'paradise': sitting in his greenhouse among 'the peonies, the anemones and all their kind'" (365). Valerian cannot think of making an effort to please anybody; confident only in himself, he has cut himself from the world, be it in the United States where he spent his youth and adulthood, or on Isle des Chevaliers where he is spending his old age. He wants nothing to do with human relationships; the few times he decides to be humane he can not make it, as when he chose Margaret thinking he could show her his ability to love completely. Instead, he has acquired a greenhouse where he spends most of his time, with a little relaxation, drinking and listening to his unpleasant records.

Valerian tends to reject everything outside the greenhouse and though he reads, he reads only his mail; he cannot read books, "because the language in them has changed so much--stained with rivulets of disorder and meaninglessness" (14), i.e., he cannot control the content. This upper-high-class attitude to censor has enhanced his great contempt for his neighbors. He assumes that he is above everything--even illness. He is convinced that there are only some things from which he may suffer. Once, for example, when he had a toothache, he thought: "This must be a stroke. No tooth could do this to me" (14).

His employees are under his full control, and, in Evelyn Hawthorne's words (1988), "He uproots them from Philadelphia . . . and brings them . . . where they must share his self-imposed exile. Like slaves interred with dead masters, the two servants must keep Valerian company to the end" (102). They have to do everything necessary to cope with him in order to lead a fairly good life, trying to understand him since he remains the only chance they have. Outside his home, they see no other way they can live. Their surrender to Valerian's rule helps create a superficial peace, but one is constantly told how serious things are. It is clear that at any time, things may collapse. In addition to the servant's loyalty, Margaret too, innocently endures her husband's illtreatment because she is unable to stand her ground. There is no respect for one another, though she tries to understand him as "some lord or priest who doubted her confession." If there is no open confrontation, it is because either she feels unable to face her opponent victoriously, or because she foresees a breakup of the household (and this goes for Sydney and Ondine). People prefer the *status quo*, with a hope for future improvement on the one hand, and to safeguard their position on the other.

The primary state of opposition is between master and servants. Valerian's servants are a black couple. The husband is Valerian's age and the wife is older than Margaret. They had been working for him for a very long time in Philadelphia before they moved together to Isle des Chevaliers, where they are spending unhappy days, hoping that one day Valerian will change his mind and return to the States. This is also what his white friends wished, as they told him, "You'll be back. Six months and you

will be bored out of your mind" (11). They can hardly figure out what caused him to take such a radical decision. But Valerian is firm. He is "mindful of their criticism, but completely indifferent to it" (11). He knows what he is doing, and only those depending on him get bored. They think if he could be deprived of his greenhouse--which as a matter of fact is their substitution, he would consider moving back.

Sydney and Ondine grumble to each other but they cannot change anything. They have to do what is required of them, i.e., get used to their situation unconditionally, since they have no alternative. They must show loyalty to the master for whom they work unpaid. They simply live to work and eat, without saving a penny. The Streets are certain that the servants cannot afford a different life. Margaret tells Valerian in a discussion about Jadine's plan to open a shop in New York: "They won't leave you and the situation they have here to go into the retail business. At this time of life, never" (30). And to crown it all, "they are lawful people and they should be" (31).

The black servants are left with no chance of self-realization, in a world where they are paradoxically the mainstays. Valerian is convinced that what he gives them is enough, if not more than what a black servant can expect. Then he is ungrateful to them, despite their extreme devotion, and though he never shows anger to them, Valerian is rarely interested in them. However, having married a white woman who is unable to handle household matters, he should know that he needs her substitutes in his decline, when he is feeling his age. Asked why he is cutting himself off from the world, he answers, "It's just that I'm undergoing this very big change in my life called dying"

(26). Therefore, he feels he does not need anybody else such as his wife whose presence he thinks is to give him a dull life--the reason why he does not want her to act or speak.

Although Margaret is weak, she sometimes attempts to assert her rights as the master's wife, to exercise her 'authority' over the servants. Unfortunately, because of her inexperience, she is afraid of them. She sees them with "unfriendly faces" and their blackness worsens her feeling of loss. When Valerian tells her not to consort with servants but guide them, she realizes that she cannot: "she was seventeen [when she married] and couldn't even give them orders the way she was supposed to" (58). She discovers that she is in the wrong place, being a high-school graduate, "a high-school dropout" as Valerian calls her, and also because she cannot clearly know what to do for the well-being of her household. That is why one woman dramatically tells her, "go to work, fast sweetheart" (58). And more, Valerian's weight is too heavy on her: he castigates anything she does or says. Even when she gives a remark about servants, he shows her that it is not her duty. Only he is able to see and correct his servant's mistakes.

Ondine therefore takes advantage of this state of misunderstanding. Knowing that Margaret cannot do anything, Ondine feels she is more important in the household than her. That is why she does not want Margaret in "her" kitchen or giving orders. Even if she never tells Margaret, Ondine tells Sydney in such words as: "Where she thinks she is?" (34). Since Valerian is seldom sharp to Ondine, Margaret attempts to befriend her. Her fear and disgust later on turn into a sort of admiration. Margaret finds out that Ondine remains, after all, the only one

she can approach, though not very closely. It is one of the victories Ondine wins over her. As a matter of fact, Margaret comes to think that they could even go to the cinema together. But unfortunately for her, when she tells Valerian, it causes them to have "a nasty quarrel and their first in which they said regrettable things to each other" (59). The quarrel results in the end of affection between them. It is the first time Margaret foresees the possibility of losing him.

Apart from having no alternative but to live there, Sydney and Ondine succeed somewhat in taming their masters. They go further, making fun of Margaret:

Ondine tried to trick her by leaving the skin on [the mango], and propping it up in ice, she [Margaret] had dug in her fork recklessly, and a slice came away. Right after that Sydney presented her with a plate of something shaped like a cardboard box. Now she had hesitated to see if the little white pebbles floating in the bowl were to be eaten or not.

(63)

And Valerian's great interest in his greenhouse gives Sydney more authority elsewhere. Because Margaret does not have authority, the servants take advantage of any weakness to try to dominate the household. As a result, Sydney has already acquired a kind of confidence from his master that whenever there is a problem, he is the first to be called upon. Sydney goes as far as to force Valerian to eat, like a nurse with a patient. At least Sydney is not trying to force him into the death that he dreads so much.

Gideon, actually called Yardman, and Thérèse too have the same dualistic situation as Ondine and Sydney, but they are not

as integrated as the latter. They approach the house rarely and deal with all odd jobs outside.

These are the overall master-servants relationships as portrayed in *Tar Baby*, about which Morrison comments as follows:

The interdependence of employee and employer is clear, but the human dependencies of such relationships are not because of the artifice of jobs and wages. When you take that structure away, what you have left is very close interrelationships, sometimes seething rages; but you don't until you remove it and see what the relationship is (Ruas 227).

In fact, the master/servants relationships overlap the white/black opposition.

Even if *Tar Baby* is set in an environment where blacks and whites are present, and even though blacks outnumber whites, it is still acknowledged that it occurs in the white world--Valerian's. As Morrison puts it: "He certainly is the center of the world. I mean white men run it, he is the center of the household--toppled perhaps, but still the center of everybody's attention--and that's pretty much the way it is" (Ruas 225). There is a kind of opposition between races on the one side, and a discussion of possible relationships between them on the other in the novel.

The white people in general have the responsibility for everything, especially the despoilation the world has known, and Valerian's impact on the island is a mere reproduction of what his people and their civilization have been doing to disrupt a world which had been harmonious for thousands of years. Therefore, there is among the black community a drive to keep

away from the white man whose world's sole lesson is "how to make waste" (203)--waste here meaning everything that may be altered, as well as destruction itself. In this respect, in what Son (the intruder) does to Jadine all along the time they stay together, he thinks he is trying to save her from the same degradation, by making her understand that she really cannot be cherished by a white man:

He thought he was rescuing her from Valerian, meaning *them*, the aliens, the people who in a mere three hundred years had killed a world millions of years old. (269)

Broadly speaking, the white people have acquired knowledge whereas blacks are kept in ignorance. As a result, the former are specialists and the latter can only be assigned to odd jobs, the case of Yardman, whose yearly work cannot be compared with the professional maintenance team who come only twice a year to Isle des Chevaliers, but make "enough [money] for a thriving business, and were able to drive Mercedeses and Yamahas all over Queen of France" (41). There is a big gap between levels, and the blacks' low level hampers their hope for progress, and this is inside and outside the USA. For instance, Haitians had to be imported to work on Isle des Chevaliers, and when they built Valerian's house --which as a matter of fact was "designed by a brilliant Mexican architect," they proved to be so ignorant and inept that they seemed totally unreliable:

Haitian laborers . . . could not distinguish between craft and art, so while the panes did not fit their sashes, the window sills and door saddles were carved lovingly to perfection. They sometimes

forgot or ignored the determination of water to flow downhill. (10)

Black men's ignorance helps the whites to strengthen their already acquired air of superiority. In this respect, Margaret does not believe that colored people are as good as white people. But blacks know that the whites are not very reliable either, the reason why they remain alert. For instance, they hardly can tolerate mixed marriages. As already discussed in *Sula*, where Sula sleeping with white men is "guilty of the unforgivable thing --the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion" (113), the old generation in *Tar Baby* think that it is something undoable; there is no need to kill the race, in the manner of the woman in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* who says: "We oughta lighten up de race." Since the white men never want the black people's well being, marrying a young white man would be simply an offer to work for them, to take care of their children.

Son clearly expresses the current opinion, saying that either people abandon their race or keep it. For him, there are no mixed marriages, simply it has become like an innate behavior in the black womenfolk to nurture white babies as they have been doing for two hundred years and now do not want to stop it. Son adds that when black women miss a white child, they sleep with white men to have their children to take care of, or when they raise black children, they alienate them from their culture in an attempt to make them look like white people. In a few words, Son thinks that they are working for the fall of their race.

Jadine, however has a different vantage point. Having lived in various milieux, she knows that not all whites are racists.

She loves a French man called Ryk who offers her expensive presents, and she hopes he will be accepted by her family:

She had come [from Paris] to see what they would feel, think, say. White but European which was not as bad as white and American; they would understand that, or would they? (48)

If Jadine's uncle and aunt tolerate, and even boast of her being educated in Paris, Son obviously sees it differently. Jadine and Son's views are a tug-of-war between extremism and tolerance (though some critics find Jadine extremely naive). Son is convinced that Jadine's success in Paris was due to prostitution, that she, as every black girl does, has to sleep with white men in exchange for gold: "Who did you have to fuck, I mean to get all that gold and be in the movies. Or was it pussy? I guess for models it's more pussy than cock" (120), he tells her. In his opinion, there cannot be true understanding between the two races: "White folks and black folks should not sit down and eat together" (210).

Son, however, being uneducated and having little contact with the white world, can hardly understand the twentieth century world and believes that his backward black community of Eloe, Florida, is the most authentic, where there is no white law and no leader. But if Son rejects the white law, he cannot make his own. Jadine is supposed to know more about race relationships, having lived in many places, in America and in Europe. But unfortunately, she refuses to see clearly because of her exaggerated faith in what Elizabeth B. House calls the "competitive acquisition of power or money" (181). She adopts the white man's manners and motives, thereby rejecting "the cultural

construction of race and mothering that are part of her Afro-American heritage" (Mobyly 763). From now on, the white world is her world, because when asked where she comes from, she answers: Baltimore, New York, Paris, the places where she really feels at home.

According to her experience in Paris, individuality is possible because there, she is first an independent individual before being black or white. Jadine is against generalization. She is grateful to Valerian for all the things he did by adopting and educating her, because he did what no one else could have done. She wants to be ahead of the twentieth century trend, believing in capitalism: having acquired enough material means, she thinks that she can establish herself as a successful businesswoman. She is optimistic about her own future, and unlike Son, she feels comfortable in the white world and sees no danger in it, although she remains confused about the black world. Jadine's shortcomings are that she seems to have lost her attachment to her black origins. She is more than an orphan, she is a cultural orphan. In Morrison's words, she has lost her "true and ancient properties." Therefore, according to some critics, she wants to be white. Although she has enough knowledge about racism, her failure to distance herself from the white world looks like an acceptance of their deeds and civilization.

Even if Son is an unreliable street boy and burglar, his remark that white men are unreliable is supported by evidence of Valerian himself. *Tar Baby* portrays his machinations so subtly that no one suspects him. It seems that his authoritarianism urges him to keep track of everything, and therefore, if one gives him no trouble, everything is all right. This is what is

apparent, but behind this, Valerian makes fun of negroes. When Jadine is fed up with his letting the intruder stay home, she is worried: "[Is he] playing the white people's game? Doesn't he know the difference between one black and another or does he think we're all . . ." (125). Indeed, he is playing a game. Valerian has had a strange attitude to black street boys, even before. They seem to be an uncommon category of people, "a certain kind of men" as Morrison says, who deserve "a certain kind of treatment." The narrator comments on him being mugged while on a trip to Miami:

He stood there, his arms over his head, while the muggers, some black teenagers with rags around their heads, ran their fingers through his pockets. One of them looked at him and must have seen disdain in Valerian's eyes. He sneered at Valerian and said, 'You don't like us, do you?' 'Gentlemen,' Valerian had replied, 'I don't know you.' (91)

Of course one may disdain such people but the attitude is not appropriate to the situation. Valerian has built his own attitude to wrongdoers; it seems that they are not capable of significant evil to him. Had he known the "gentlemen," would he have liked them? They are not the ones to be called gentlemen anyway. As the narrator concludes:

It must have been the same antique grace that made him look at a raggedy black man who had been hiding in his wife's closet . . . and say, "good evening," and offer him a drink. (91)

By inviting the intruder to have a drink, Valerian humiliates everybody, especially his wife, in honor of Son, the

thief. He even happens to make friends with him; Son is the only one who succeeds to make him laugh "to beat the band." But this friendship is not intended to be profitable to Son. As he is not intended to be challenged, Valerian does it to keep turmoil in his household: "Valerian thoroughly enjoyed the disarray that his invitation had thrown them into" (145).

He is certain that they all expect him to acknowledge his mistake--but he is convinced that he is not mistaken at all. He thinks they expect him to apologize, but can he do so to black subjects? Valerian is even surprised by the attitude of responsibility that the blacks display. He feels:

Disappointment nudging contempt for the outrage Jade and Sydney and Ondine exhibit defending property and personnel that did not belong to them from a black man who was one of their own. (145)

Apart from the evidence about who is the owner and who is not, this quotation also tells that black men should bear collective responsibility for each other's mistakes. It is obvious that Son is not really theirs, apart from his blackness. Yet, they have pity for Valerian's wife who found the man--a gorilla as she said --in her closet. Unfortunately, their reaction implies the violation of the unwritten rule of silence over the Lord's deeds. Failure to do so constitutes an offense, to someone who owns them, who has violated their identity. Susan L. Blake argues that the two servants

proudly claim an identity shaped by the relationship to the colonizer's family distinct from his. Jadine occupies an ambivalent position of being almost but not quite a member of the colonizer's family. (196)

Valerian's sympathy towards Jadine is part of his trick, and here follows the signification of the novel's title. *Tar Baby* is an allusion to Joel Chandler Harris's story of "Brer' Rabbit and the Tar Baby." According to Morrison herself, even though it is a children's story, she was terrified, especially by the notion of the tar baby being a lump of tar in the form of a little girl set in the field on a sunny day to trap Rabbit, a little thief. The tar is melting and Rabbit comes and gets "stuck and more stuck" in it. Morrison explains that

Tar Baby being a black woman and the rabbit a black man. I introduced a white man and remembered the tar. The fact that it was made out of tar and was a black woman, if it was made to trap a black man--the white man made her for that purpose. (Ruas 226)

The reason for this, Morrison adds, is that one has not only to benefit from the advantages the white world offers. "Tar Baby," she says, "is also a racial slur, like 'nigger', and a weapon hostile to the black man" (Ruas 226).

Valerian raised a beautiful black lady, who later on was supposed to pay back the tenderness she got. He lets in an intruder whom he integrates into his household on the spot, and like the trapper who would do anything he can for the incoming animal to be caught, Valerian helps Son be caught by Jadine by protecting him from everybody. For example, he warns him: "Don't be surprised if [Sydney] bites your head off" (147), as if Sydney were more dangerous than Son himself. Valerian reaches his goal very quickly because a few days later, Son and Jade are in love with each other, while Valerian seems to ignore what is happening. If Son had bad intentions, this time he will not harm

the Streets any longer, having been diverted by Jadine's lure. He is so attracted that he remains convinced that he cannot do without her, that she is the only thing on earth he needs. As Jadine has been blinded by Valerian's Sympathy and also her drive for the white world, she fails to see Valerian's real purpose, and even does not understand that she is involved in Valerian's game.

The third antagonism in *Tar Baby* is in man/woman relationships. Man thinks he has the right to oppress woman, and he therefore tries to keep her down. In the novel, unlike the black couple, the Streets are never on good terms and live in separation over a trivial quarrel. Valerian is always aggressive in his speech, adding to Margaret's solitude more moral pain. Margaret cannot answer back to convince him that she really is somebody. The narrator illustrates the tensions between them as follows:

The wilderness creeping into Valerian and Margaret's seasoned and regulated arguments, subverting the rules so that they looked at each other . . . , lifted their lips and bared their teeth. (68)

This quotation satirizes the smiles they have to each other by simply giving a scientific description of the process of smiling as though to someone who has never had a smile. By so doing, the act is deprived of its very content, which is rather reversed. One may show teeth to someone in a deliberately unpleasant manner as a kind of open defiance, an outright way to show that one is ridiculous in what one is doing and provoke his/her fury. The emptiness of their smiles is a mockery to each other, but which cannot prevent them from staying together anyway

--like quarreling dogs, these are really smiles of aggression-- Margaret knowing that all one has to do is to conform to him: to "breathe a slice of your air," as she tells him.

Margaret, unfortunately, is the only one to feel that the way they live is not really appropriate, Lauren Lepow makes an accurate comment as follows:

[Valerian's] uprooting of Margaret, and his failure to help her become rooted in the alien soil in which he so shallowly transplants her . . . He will transplant hydrangeas from Philadelphia to the Caribbean and see that they grow, but he will not begin to do the same for his wife. (369-70)

What he can do is just to keep an eye on her. The fact that he resists his servants' efforts to convince him that Margaret does not drink shows how eager to control her he is. Valerian has a sorry idea to oppose them, that one should not be impressed by those who take soft drinks in the presence of others because they hide to drink brandy afterwards. That is why when she comes out sobbing, terrified by the "gorilla" in her closet, he says with the wisdom of the drunk, "she's drunk, and nobody's paid her any attention for a whole hour" (80).

Valerian only was pleased when Margaret gave birth to Michael, but he was disappointed once when he realized that she was unable to mother him properly. Therefore, as Michael is now grown up and wants to live on his own in the States, Margaret becomes Valerian's scapegoat, the one who has deprived him of the most cherished thing he ever had. But as she explains later, her attitude toward her baby Michael was a way of venting her frustration on someone whom she could manage. She is not afraid to

say, "I did it as long as I could," that is, until the day Michael could fight back, expressing the current will of everybody in the household--the will to dominate. As the husband dominated the wife, she dominated the child. Here the wife is, among other things, a victim of the man's innate sexist privileges.

Valerian's uncles only had baby girls, and when he was born as the only son in the family, he was welcomed as a Messiah:

Valerian's mother . . . delivered one girl and one boy, who was the future of the family. When his father died and Valerian was seven, the uncles gathered to steady the family and take over the education . . . since it was "self-understood" that he would inherit the candy factory. (50)

From the above quotation, it is clear that society grants privileges to boys than to girls, and that therefore a baby girl is a hopeless child, who in a sense equals the death of the family when she is the only baby born. Girls' rights at home are very limited insofar as they cannot inherit. And the way only uncles handled the matter after their brother's death, Valerian too works alone to run his home. He rejects coping with his wife who is, as he made her, a second-class woman.

Valerian's sexist behavior is duplicated by his black counterpart, Son, who after having conquered Jadine, wants her to be submissive. Forgetting his unculturedness, he claims to be her god. Son is therefore the mouthpiece of traditional beliefs in the black community--that women are all but sexual human beings, by virtue of which men in Eloë, probably unable to understand how Son came up to get Jadine (because she seems too snobbish for

him), ask her: "Who is controllin [the relationship]? " (255). Of course, Jade will not take it that way; a modern girl, as she understands it, needs no control. However, when they tell her about the late Cheyenne, Son's first wife whom he killed unintentionally, how she was renowned for her sexual generosity: "the best pussy in Florida," Jade now sees another dimension to her relationships with Son; the question is: should she be herself or try to outperform that woman and be caught by tradition again? Son's failure to take her personality into account increases the tension between the two. He thinks that she has gone astray by rejecting *his* own culture--ironically, she is rejecting the black heritage rather than her own because hers is white actually. Jadine considers him a "cultural throwback."

Only Sydney and his wife lead a comfortable life as a couple; they have no need to dominate one another since they are equally dominated by Valerian. They need mutual support. The narrator describes them sleeping back to back in these terms:

There is safety in those backs. Each one feels it radiating from the other, knows that the steady, able spine of its partner is a hip turn away. Then, their sleep is tranquil, earned, unlike the sleep of the old men upstairs in cotton pajamas. (43)

One may understand that they work hard, so hard that later, they are exhausted and have no time to think of undermining each other; rather, they take the rest they deserve. Moreover, they understand and trust each other.

Earlier, Valerian's capacity to feel grief was illustrated by the misunderstanding about Michael. This is part of Morrison's worry about children in the modern world, who do not get the care

they should, and become victims of the adults' irresponsibility and mischief. Child abuse therefore is one of the big issues in Morrison's fiction. In *Tar Baby*, it is emphasized in such a way that the controversy it raises helps break relationships among people. Valerian thought Michael would inherit the candy factory, but when he learns that Michael has no such intentions, he builds a greenhouse to spend the rest of his days in, because it is a way to avoid Margaret, whom he thinks urged Michael to scorn wealth: "to think poetry was incompatible with property " (75). She cannot be forgiven for Michael's decision. She has "made a perpetual loser of one of the most beautiful, the brightest boy in the land" (75). Valerian refuses to acknowledge his own part in Michael, thereby completing his alienation from the family.

This is the way people live at Valerian's. His patronizing attitude and contempt result in people's submissiveness. Their efforts to understand him are doomed to fail because he is not ready to understand anyone. Jadine who seems to be the only one to benefit from people's affection represents, far from being a mere adopted daughter and niece, a young generation, in a sense aloof from the existing beliefs. Unfortunately, she cannot be the bridge between the white world she aspires to and the black community which theoretically remains hers. In *Tar Baby*, it appears that those who have moral strength are the ones who are likely to survive and make others do. Otherwise, the many errors of conduct are like bombs that may explode at any time since no one has the mind really at rest: "characters function very comfortably in their self-involved dilemmas" (Ruas 246) before things explode.

The break up in the household is triggered by an unusual attitude that crowns Valerian's dilemmas, combining unusual behavior with the accumulation of his deception and his disgust with Margaret. Valerian's life is in decline and he spends his spare time lost in his thoughts. Moreover, his sleepless nights add to his grief and increase his will to shock. Therefore, when he first sees Son brought from his wife's closet and says "in a voice made stentorian by port, 'Good evening, sir. Would you care for a drink ?'" (80), when everybody had thought he would call the police, he is starting his game. Faced with people's unanimity about how to deal with the situation, he inevitably chooses an oppositional, confrontational course, imposing his rule, not quite differently from what he usually does, but now in an extremely humiliating way for the others.

Indeed, both wife and servants are flattened by his cynicism. He proves his insensitivity when everybody has handed him the matter already guessing what he should do. Valerian does not weigh the outcome of his actions, as he knows that he will remain the unequalled master, however things are. Therefore, he intensifies an event which in itself is a trivial incident, especially after Sydney has already put the intruder out of danger. Since Sydney uses Valerian's gun, Valerian finds another way to assert his power over that gun. His new weapon in a false generosity offered to Son, who in no case can be grateful for it. Surprisingly, Son very soon seeks friendship. He wants to be on good terms with everybody, to be one of theirs, as Valerian said. He even succeeds in dominating Valerian as a result of the latter's miscalculation. Valerian reckons on his self-ascribed divinity, but he is trapped by Son, who proves to know more about

horticulture. A certain plant in the greenhouse would not bloom until the day Son tells Valerian to shake it. To this, Son adds a method of keeping ants out of the greenhouse by putting mirrors in their way. Son's success is at the expense of Valerian's power. He is no longer God, even in the greenhouse.

The narrator describes Valerian's reaction as follows:

He was tickled to death by the sight of four cyclamen blossoms, so happy that he was considering putting down mirrors for ants. He'd gone around all morning beating up other plants, especially his miniature orange trees which had come with no blossoms or fruit. He had even drafted a letter to the consulate asking whether a B-class visa could be arranged for a local employee of his [i.e., Son]. (165)

Again, he is trying to impose a dependency relationship on Son by making him his employee, but this time, roles are reversed somehow: Son commands and Valerian executes. As opposed to Valerian, Son's extended stay at L'Arbe de la Croix leads to the moral failure of people there, a situation which is Valerian's decisive victory because it was his aim to humiliate those he dominates. The fact that he thinks his blacks' attitude is Uncle Tom-ish shows how tricky his racial opinions are. As a matter of fact, he contradicts himself in his ^{wife's} earlier argument that they are loyal and should be. He stresses the no-win conditions that he has kept them in. Nevertheless, Valerian forgets that he cannot do without them. He needs their zeal to defend him.

As Valerian sins by an excess of cynical self-confidence to fulfil his evil will to shock and punish, and make fun of people he despises, the servants' reaction comes as a result of a state

of shock, generated by an endless confusion about who they are, what they are and should be doing.

Out of their will to get rid of the swamp black man but also to keep their jobs, they now realize that the fact that they used to keep quiet was a self-condemnation, for now that they find it urgent to speak, they cannot see how a product of American civilization--a master dehumanized by a capitalism that cultivated insensitivity and selfishness--can be dealt with. Here Valerian fits in Thérèse's image of America:

Where doctors took the stomachs, eyes, umbilical cords,
the backs of the neck where the hair grew, blood,
sperm, hearts and fingers of the poor and froze them in
plastic packages to be sold later to the rich
Where women took their children behind trees in the
park and sold them to strangers. (151)

People like Thérèse know that they have nothing to expect from such whites, since they even drop what precious things they have such as their babies to get money, and also since the poor are made for the rich.

Valerian provides his servants with evidence by announcing that he has fired Yardman and Thérèse for having stolen apples that they themselves have been to buy. The news provokes outrage and needs more clarification. By it, servants are factually warned that they really have no place there. Indeed, in the master's process of changing the order of things, loyalty can be punished as a crime, crime rewarded or a trivial incident intensified, depending on his mood. His ingratitude is a stark humiliation to all blacks there and a denial of their past deeds. They thought that their long stay with the Streets had given them

some rights, at least about the chores and therefore the ones who perform them, those whom Valerian hired "to do more of the work he was not capable of and pay them again according to some scale of value that would outrage Satan himself" (203). They think they make enough sacrifices to deserve a minimum of respect and understanding.

Ondine and Sydney think they made the household--and certainly the black manpower have done everything they could for it to be what it is. Therefore, it is mere commonsense that they require respect and protection. If an intruder and thief is offered a drink, an employee who takes some apples should have better treatment. Moreover, Yardman and Thérèse help Sydney and Ondine very much, so much that they cannot stand missing them. Sydney is old and Ondine has swollen ankles and cannot stand extra work and movements. Also, they assume that their know-how makes them irreplaceable. Therefore, they constitute an antagonistic force to Valerian.

Through their and Valerian's speeches, one can find that there is a kind of power struggle among them, which creates a polemic. The conflict opens when Valerian hears the name of Thérèse and says, "Thérèse? Wonderful. Thérèse the thief and Gideon the Get-Away-Man," to announce their dismissal. He finds it wonderful to be reminded of one he has fired. Further, he shows his cynicism again when told that he should have informed them. He says amused: "Beg you pardon? . . . I'll get someone else." Valerian is either amused by remarks given to him, or he becomes outraged, because talking with them would mean that he is bowing to them. By saying: "Well, they did and I let them go and *that's that*," Valerian reasserts his godlike status (emphasis mine). Ondine

telling him: "You didn't tell *Us*" meaning blacks signifies the antagonistic force against his power (emphasis mine). Sydney decidedly shows Valerian how ridiculous his rule is as follows: "Other folks steal and they are put in the guest room." And he talks on the behalf of people in the household, including Margaret: "We were slighted by taking in a thief and now we are slighted by letting another go." Sydney and the people he speaks for oppose logic and compassion to Valerian's insensitivity.

The master cannot have a reliable argument to explain to people he has offended in a game clearly designed against them. He needn't explain that it is 'self-understood' that the negroes have no part to play. "Surely you don't expect me to explain my actions, defend them to you?" (205), he argues. They are already prejudiced, and then Valerian sees barriers between him and them, not as servants--because at least Jadine is not and she has a respectable standing--but as "the other." Morrison elaborates on this attitude of negative overgeneralization as a product of racism (eased by color) and the economic system. She tells Ruas:

We are perceived as the lowest class because we can be identified that way [through physical difference]. It wouldn't make any difference what we wore or what neighborhood we lived in, we're still visible as that. It's not because one is black that the prejudice exists. The prejudice exists because one can identify the person who was once a slave or in the lowest class, and the caste system can survive longer. . . . I think all your [white] people think that because they are taught to. I think that it will last as long as the economy remains this way. (243)

From this elaboration, it means that blacks suffer from a negative overgeneralization which is linked to their past as slaves. And this is made to last longer by the color that makes them distinct, and the faith in wealth that characterizes the American economy (a faith that blacks too, take for granted). Morrison has a deep concern for people who are not treated seriously when referred to as "these people," the same Valerian knows he needn't compromise with when he says: "I am questioned by these people, as if I *could* be called into question" (206). But this cannot stop them. Dismissing Sydney and Ondine is the last resort to get out of the chaos he has originated, but unfortunately, he finds himself disarmed.

He remains with no one to execute his orders, and all the worse for him, he is unable to carry out his wishes himself. Dismissing them is virtually his death sentence, having no child and an unreliable wife. He finds that his creation was incomplete, or simply as Lepow argues: "his world is uncreated" (370). The blacks want to show who really is powerful in the household, and Ondine's fight with Margaret, although her strength is on the wane, becomes her final self-assertion and test of Valerian's power. The fact that Valerian sets on shaking and saying nothing over his wife being beaten puts an end to his supremacy. Therefore, Ondine who already feels she is the only woman there can strengthen her power, now that she needn't be silent to save anything whatever. She has got "her diadem braids turned into horns" (209), and "reveals her long-suppressed knowledge of Margaret's evil" (Lepow 370).

Chaos as discussed above can be summed up in four aspects. First, there is the disarray Valerian nurtures among his

household. Second are the challenges to Valerian's rule and the firing of the servants. Third is the situation resulting in Ondine's fighting Margaret. In the end, one can stress the fall of Valerian, completed by Ondine's revelation about Margaret. Finally, the chaos is also characterized by a racially polished speech, revealing the antagonism between the two races. One's color is used to insult, as if being so was already devilish. Ondine calls Margaret, "You white freak! You baby killer," the same as Margaret who retaliates as follows: "You nigger! You nigger bitch! Shut your big mouth" (208).

When Ondine reveals Margaret's abuse of baby Michael, and that Margaret confirms that it was "delicious," Valerian's affectation is so deep that he thinks he is about to die. He realizes himself that the world is not his any more. Broadly speaking, the combination of events at L'Arbe de la Croix ends in putting each in his/her place as Lepow puts it: "Margaret, Sydney, Ondine, Jade, even Valerian himself are liberated from the false and stressful position they occupied in Valerian's hollow hierarchy" (371). Looking at Margaret, "she seemed strong to him. He was wasting away, filed to nothing but grief, and she was strong, stronger" (237).

Son, the catalyst of the events is, after all, the only one to benefit from them, because as could have been foreseen, he succeeds to show Jadine that he is the only one capable of giving her the moral support she needs, out of the shock caused by minutes of shameful insults and fighting. He turns himself from intruder into conqueror, the one who can judge situations and human relationships in a racist world. Nevertheless, Son is only sexually attracted by Jadine because there is nothing else he can

do for her. Having opposite views of life and society, it takes them less than a week of acquaintance to arrange things and run away to New York, the family knowing nothing.

Son's attraction to Jadine is something like what happens to the rabbit caught in the tar baby. Just as the tar baby was so sticky that it could not release the rabbit, so is Son stuck to Jadine, caught up by her beauty. But in Lepow's words, Son's "world view is narrowed by both sexism and racism. Son fails to understand that Jadine is his equal" (370). They are both incomplete, and so they cannot live together.

In sum, by an attempt to preside over everything, the master in *Tar Baby* finds a way to put ~~others~~ *aside*. Privileges offered by racial and economic heritage become personal trump cards. In relationships among people, there is a prevalence of the "self-understood" superior-inferior domination which regulates life based on race, class and gender.

In light of Jadine's experience in the States and Paris, one can learn that there discrimination can be transcended. Unfortunately, Jadine learned that sometimes the black needs to behave as an inferior to get the white man's approval. Such an attitude only makes one's personality incomplete and misunderstood. In the case of Jadine herself, she loses her black identity in want of "being white." The white man does not care or simply finds black compliance a must, whereas black holders of the tradition reject her alienation.

In *Tar Baby*, if the white master prefers submission from his subjects, he forgets a very important element, i.e., to know himself. His assumption that he knows everything in his environment diverts him from evidence about himself. His illusion

leads to the chaos intensified by the moral failure of the older generation, which ends up with Valerian himself diminished, both to his servants and to his wife against whom he has done his best to keep down. It also leaves Margaret diminished by Ondine's revelation of child abuse. The chaos is the only situation in which everyone mirrors him/herself unmistakably. The white woman, however, cannot gain more confidence from her husband's fall; she remains therefore the greatest loser, assailed both by her husband and her servants; along with Jadine whose education has made herself a "cultural orphan," with no self and no family. But although Valerian feels diminished, he cannot surrender; on the other hand, he is unwilling to examine the "evidence about himself." He prefers not to know.

CHAPTER IIIWOMEN'S FAILURE TO ACHIEVE IDENTITY

When Valerian tells Margaret, "You are too stupid to live" (70), he sets bare outright the extent of his contempt for her, resulting from a general prejudiced view of women as helpless individuals. Margaret is overwhelmed by her husband who oppresses her, not only because she is weak, but also more, because she is his wife. Valerian therefore wants to kill her, not by a physical death (because he has never been physically violent) but by a psychological death, plunging her into a well-nurtured self-pity; and his determination is enhanced by her failure to fight back. Margaret lacks what young Jadine has in excess. Jadine's character is such that she rejects what she does not like immediately. Anything which does not meet her world view is dismissed, but Margaret appears to be deprived of foundation for self-realisation.

In *Tar Baby*, as in her other novels, Toni Morrison engages in what Rosalind Miles (1987) terms "the sex war", whose battlefields are "sexual stereotypes ... usually the first, last and intermediate resort of the scoundrel, susceptible as they are to unimaginable permutations and manipulations" (112). Women all over the world deal with "the 'inevitability' of women's dependence on men, with all the misery and denial of authority it entails" (125). *Tar Baby's* multiracial characters originally deal with two different kinds of sexism: the white and the black. Morrison joins the major trends in women's literature and criticism, especially about the way marriage is viewed as "only one of the instruments through which the dominant male wages the

sex war on unprepared, unarmed females" (Miles 128). Considered weak and helpless, women are victims of men who ironically tempt to provide them with "social dispensations which are supposed to make women so happy and fulfilled and yet which so often drive them to extremes of anger, madness and despair", Miles adds (126). This fact is well debated in other Afro-American women's novels like *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, from which the lesson is that marriage is not to be viewed as an end in itself because it does not necessarily enhance women's growth and maturation.

Tar Baby's Margaret is good evidence, of that kind of sexual discrimination. She is a woman whose sense of self-esteem is rather aborted by a millionaire who marries her in her teens. It is more a matter of nature than deception for Valerian not to be on good terms with his wives. He has divorced a woman -- "That unlovable shrew who was unlovable to this very day" (143)--whom he missed only when he heard she was dead. Although one is not told about the way they lived, it is revealed that Valerian was convinced that she hated him, whereas for her:

In nine years of marriage she had had two abortions and all she wanted to talk about during these visits [when she haunted Valerian in his greenhouse] was how relieved she was that she'd had at least that foresight.

He wished she felt something else (143).

Marrying a high-school beauty queen was for Valerian an occasion to show his first wife that he was capable of loving. Unfortunately, their marriage uproots Margaret. She will not see her family any more: "She was gone and other people were where

they belonged. She was going up or down stairs; other people seemed to be settled somewhere" (57).

By uprooting her, Valerian can make himself her owner, and even though the first time he saw her "something inside him knelt down," he is too cautious about her as he knows what he understands as "feminine dementia": "He had seen examples... many times before and thought she was up to her old combo of masochism plus narcissism that he believed common to exceptionally beautiful women" (144), he thinks when she comes out of her closet crying. She is therefore a victim of her beauty, so to speak. Valerian only cares about his own interests when he puts an end to her studies, killing her intellect. Margaret is then condemned to be his "object" since with no learning and no maturity, she hardly can think of leading a life without him. Valerian rather pays for Jadine's studies in Paris at the Sorbonne. Whereas Margaret feels lost, Jadine enjoys her life very much and feels to a certain extent free from Valerian's authority. When Margaret is suffering from loneliness, Valerian says Jadine is there for her; it looks as if he has surrendered her completely. Yet, had he surrendered her, maybe she would have managed to create a happier life for herself. On the contrary, he keeps an eye on her. After thirty years of marriage, he still wants to know whether she has drunk and what she drank.

Margaret looks like the opposite of what Valerian wants. Surprisingly, in the normal course of things, it appears that Valerian does not want to complicate his servants' lives, even when they are tricking his wife. He ridicules her in front of them, instead of nurturing her self-realization. Lepow says that "his petty attacks on Margaret are detestable" (367). For

instance, when Valerian tells Margaret that he feels he is to die soon, she tries to cheer him up in vain as follows:

" Retirement isn't death ."

" A distinction without a difference."

" well, I am not dying, I am living."

" A difference without a distinction" (26).

Margaret is right when she tells him: "you make everything I do sound stupid" (66). Valerian illustrates what Audre Lorde calls blaming the victim for her victimization as referred to in the first chapter, as in the following passage showing him mocking her lack of education.

Margaret says:

" I don't have to sit here and be called names ! "

" Idiot. I married an idiot ! "

" And I married an old fool ! "

" Of course you did. Who else but an old fool would marry a high school dropout off the back of a truck ! " (70).

Valerian is deliberately dismissive because he is sure and certain that her challenge is always vain, having put her in a situation that no one else would tolerate. She is abused by everyone because she has no protection, and servants find no authority in her because Valerian wanted so. He has limited contacts to the minimum, and unlike some female characters like Cleo in Doroty West's *The Living Is Easy* (1948) who, even if she is totally controlled by her husband, controls him by refusing sex, Valerian has refused it himself when he decided on separation. His contempt for her is well expressed in the fact that he even really does not know her: " He had lived with a

woman who had made something kneel down in him the first time he saw her but about whom he knew nothing" (242).

Margaret's attempts to resist her husband lack determination because she herself is not self--confident. She cannot imagine how she can offend Valerian whom ironically she never knew wrong, as the narrator explains: " She had never known him to be [wrong] and doubted if he could be in error about anything" (59). That is why she makes herself responsible for the outcome of her challenges vis-a-vis him, as for instance when they quarrel over going to cinema with Ondine, she is worried because she feels the possibility of losing him. She feels she can only be someone with Valerian Street, hence she makes it her duty to understand him, although unsuccessfully. After her failure, she retreats to an endless loneliness and wishful thinking. Her situation never improves, but Valerian keeps on telling her when she asks for something: " next time, " which never comes. Margaret can only look at Valerian " with the complete dislike of a natural late-sleeper for a cheerful early-riser" (22), but this is not enough because she feels completely lost. Even when Valerian could feel for her, there was

nothing to keep her from feeling drowned when he was not there in the spaciousness of that house with only a colored couple with unfriendly faces to save her .

Alone in the house, peeping into a room it looked all right, but the minute she turned her back she heard the afterboom, and who could she tell that to ? (58).

The house in which Valerian puts her looks like a prison despite its luxury. She is lost in every aspect of her life,

being unable even to eat correctly meals offered. At table, Margaret feels the most miserable, as she even fails to distinguish food from the painted flowers to the china. In fact, coming from a very simple family--something that even Valerian's uncles had contested--she needs assistance to get acquainted with high class manners. The minimum of tenderness that she lacks frustrates her and urges her to illtreat baby Michael as a way to assuage her humiliation. Margaret also is overwhelmed by her will to dominate which is defeated as she is deprived of her virtual authority over her employees, since now it is her who must depend on them and learn from them, as here in Ondine's kitchen: although she tells Valerian : " I was a child bride remember ? I hadn't time to learn to cook before you put me in a house that already had one [cook] plus a kitchen fifty miles from the front door" (26), in early times she used to see in learning from Ondine an invaluable opportunity: " Ondine was just about to show her how to make crust (and Margaret by then knew the honor of the offer, since Ondine didn't like sharing recipes on kitchen space)" (59). Margaret's remark adds that by marrying Valerian she was a victim of circumstances she could not understand.

It appears that Margaret very soon acknowledges her incapacity to prove herself a worthy woman. She takes for granted the fact that she is not in her right place. She knows that she cannot challenge anyone in her house; thus she becomes self-centered. Ironically the only relief she can get is by thinking about her absent son, Michael, although he is the one she tortured. Margaret is like an outsider, who stays " because he and his husband's there" (17), failing even to know about her household after thirty years of marriage. Valerian and Ondine give her a

dull life. For Ondine, she is "the main bitch of the prince" (35); the one who is pushing Valerian, as he says himself, "into my last and final hours," instead of letting him "saunter toward it" (35). Things really go wrong with Ondine, and it is Sydney who keeps on "refereeing" them when Margaret comes to her. Only Jade can keep her good company; as a matter of fact, they "get on like schoolgirls."

Valerian has deprived Margaret of the generally agreed upon role of women in families, that of sustaining them and their economic functions. Freed from cooking and shopping, she is completely unnecessary, and worse, her sex life is reduced to nothing:

She lay there wiping teary cheeks... There was nothing the cool sculptured spaces could do to keep her from forgetting the fact that she was almost fifty sitting on a hill in the middle of a jungle ... where her husband was punishing her for forgetting to put the salad things back ... and where her sex life had become such a wreck it was downright interesting. (86-7)

The ultimate result of Valerian's illtreatment of Margaret is a blatant humiliation. Margaret is like a doll that Valerian has made for himself, but which happens not to please him. So he feels like misusing it in order to wear it out as soon as possible. Or from another vantage point, Valerian acts like someone who has a better wife elsewhere, who therefore has lost all interest in Margaret to such an extent that he revels in seeing her suffering. By performing what Toni Morrison calls man's

" male rituals, " Valerian , as Ondine remarks, "Kept her stupid; kept her idle. That always spells danger" (279).

By the end of the novel, Morrison presents a situation of shift as referred to in the previous chapter, in which we find Valerian tumbling from his self-ascribed position as the beholder, whereas he sees Margaret ascending higher and higher. However, it is obvious that she has been deeply affected by Valerian's treatment. If she dares tell him that she abused baby Michael because she could, it is because the servants' uprising creates a situation, in which she feels obliged to express herself. Moreover, with the indirect help of Valerian, Ondine has overpowered Margaret, the reason why the latter comes to apologize to her in these terms:

It's terrible living in the same house with your own witness. But I think I understand it. You wanted me to hate you. Didn't you ? ...

.....

And you felt good hating me, didn't you ?

I could be the mean white lady and you could be the good colored one. Did that make it easier for you ?

.....

We're both childless, Ondine. And we're both stuck here.

We should be friends. It's not too late.(240-41)

Margaret expresses what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese does in her book, *Feminism Without Illusion* (1991) as follows: "Women who belong to socially oppressed groups might understandably see privileged women as their oppressors or at least as beneficiaries

of their oppression " (19). In this respect, Ondine rarely feels compassion for her, and is eager to confirm that she is the only woman in the household. Ondine succeeds her struggle for power, and her success is eased by the comfort she feels from her understanding with Sydney. Margaret's failure to occupy her socially acknowledged place reverses the order of things viewed by many as: " The white woman, victimised by a white male patriarchy takes out her anger at being suppressed on the socially accepted scapegoat, the negro! " (Hernton, 1969:140)

It is also important to analyse what goes around the love story of Jadine and her street-rough lover, Son. Son's expression of sexism embodies a blame of racism. For him, the white man is the origin of all the mischief, and his anger to the black woman is due to the fact that she blindly follows what is imposed by the white, instead of valuing the black lifestyle. But it appears that Son's struggle to keep Jadine is mostly a struggle to keep a sexual partner. And he succeeds in the beginning because she happens to feel "unorphaned" for the first time. But in truth, there is a dilemma between the two over sex and domination. Son wants to dominate her through the relationships they have, being to her " the man who fucked like a star," in a novel where, as Mobley argues, Morrison "wants to affirm the self-reliance and freedom of a black woman who makes choices for her own life on her own terms" (761). Jadine's education and success have completely diverted her from any traditional view which could tend to act on her liberty. It is due to the way she was raised insofar as first, Ondine, as she acknowledges it herself, did not teach her human relationships, the sense of community in the Afro-American environment. And

second, the abundance she had of Valerian and in France destroyed her sense of reality.

Therefore, Son is wrong when he thinks that having her as partner is enough to control her. They enjoy life together, but as far as Son's material contribution is absent, mere sexual performance cannot keep them together. Moreover, there is evidence in Son's all-black community--which he thinks is the most authentic--of women's abuse and submission, as well as consideration as sexual human beings by black men: his first wife, Cheyenne's fame for her "statewide pussy" foreshadows what in men's view can keep a couple together. Also, Frisco who "treated his wife like a dog and ran other women all over time" (170), brings more evidence to black male inadequacies.

When Jadine is in Eloë, Soldier's boring conversation with her reveals more of what she can expect in that community, and that Son's choice of Jadine is probably not the best if he cannot control her: "He cannot distinguish a good woman from a snake." Son totally controlled Cheyenne, but he was a slave to her sex: "She didn't control nothing. At least not during the day. But good God she sure did run the nights" (256). Soldier does not mean that she controlled him through sex, but that her sexual performance was so great that Son could not stand missing it, i.e., there is no idea of control behind Cheyenne's performance. The act has less difference in interest with what happens to Celie in *The Color Purple*, when she does not feel anything as her husband is making love to her. She only feels his burden and says it is as if he is going to the toilet! Jadine then is outraged by this community's manners, and this also appears through the interpretation she gives to the night women who, as

she says, think that "sex is dirty," and whom she rejects completely.

Son puts forth his sexist views while he compares plants to women: "they are like women, you have to jack them up every once in a while. Make em act nice, like they're supposed to" (148). What he says is pretty much the basis of discrimination shared by many men, as we said in the first chapter. Jadine cannot stand a culture which apparently is ~~aga~~ against her. She would rather become a pariah, and to understand her, Morrison explains her strategy to convey social states of things. As she explains:

There are several levels of the pariah working in my writing. The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs. The Civilisation of black people that lives apart from but in juxtaposition to other civilisations is a pariah relationship. (Reyes 20)

Morrison says that the pariahs are the ones through which people and/or societies mirror themselves, in her discussions of moral issues as experienced by blacks. Like Sula who completely rejects (and is rejected by) her society, Jadine is ready to reject whatever she finds backward or rooted in the past, for she is "the antithesis of black folk and community values" (Coleman 64). She is opposed to what she thinks community calls a good woman, i.e., the one who is good to her husband and to others. So when she tells Ondine: "I don't want to learn how to be the kind of woman you are talking about because I don't want to be that kind of woman" (282), she reveals her rejection of any thing the black community expects from her; "she must walk away from Ondine's

accusation that she is an inadequate woman, for she has fully accepted her responsibility to mother herself" (Lepow 375).

Son, who pretends to value fraternity, has among other shortcomings his intransigence. He wants to impose his views on her, and like Valerian, he is stubborn and rejects all of Jadine's proposals for life.

Therefore, she is offended by his attempt to dominate her and when she goes away, she regrets her time spent with him:

I never worked so hard in my life to
keep something going. I'd never done that before.
I never cared whether a relationship worked or not,
. . . if it worked it worked. If it didn't--later.
But this time I worked my butt off and all I got
for it was a black eye and the rent. (279)

While in New York, it appears that they need each other for self realization. As James Coleman puts it:

Through the tender expressions of the early
stages of the New York affair, we see clearly
that Son needs Jadine to direct him toward
material achievement in life, and Jadine needs
Son to give her a feeling of security and belonging.
(65)

Unfortunately, although each is in a sense what the other lacks, the polemic between them makes it impossible to achieve compromise. Jadine prefers to return to her boyfriend in Paris, from whom she hopes for better treatment, instead of remaining with Son to whom "She kept on barking at . . . about equality, sexual equality as though he thought women were inferior. He couldn't understand that" (268); nevertheless, women have proved

him to be as competitive as men, hard working and^{self-confident} in the image of his grandmother who built a cowshed with almost no help.

Jadine has a strong sense of independence based on the fact that she never found herself in trouble or faced with responsibility after her adoption. The easy life they secured her and her success in Paris have strengthened her self-absorption and need for admiration. At the same time she has internalized the white way of life that she grew up in. One should note in passing what is meant by the white way of life; a life of prosperity and constancy, as reflected by Morrison when she uses the "Dick and Jane" primer text in *The Bluest Eye*:

Here is the House. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane living in the green-and-white house. They are very happy.

See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play.

Who will play with Jane? (2068)

She built her personal will with reference to the white world. However, although, she aims at being the best, her mind is unsettled, because she is far from being the model she wants to be. Moreover, she cannot be a model for black females. She is outraged by the African woman in the yellow dress, whose elegance and beauty make her feel inauthentic. Jadine is careless, when she rejects the woman as a symbol of African splendor, because being rejected implies the rejection of her African heritage. Jadine takes a dangerous option, because her economic success is not enough if she cuts herself from her racial and cultural identity. In this respect, Jadine does not feel like Sula, although both develop their individuality against their black

communities' will. Sula rejects the traditional illtreatment of women and also rejects marriage because she sees in it the end of her self. She has sex with blacks and reportedly with whites because she wants to, not because they do.

As for Jadine, she measures herself by white values, rejecting black people in part because they are not as good as whites. Therefore, when Jadine rejects the night women and the women hanging in trees in *Sein de Veilles*, She may think that she rejects what is bad in them, i.e., primitivism and attachment to traditional values of sisterhood and motherhood constituting the imposed female image, in favor of a self-ascribed one, but these women are not as bad as she thinks. Jadine even rejects her mother. Jadine is the incremental repetition of *The Bluest Eye's* Pecola Breadlove. Both have a strong drive to white values, but Jadine succeeds in getting what she wants. Jadine is unsympathetic, unlike Pecola, who innocently endures her sorrowful state of mind as well as black men's assaults.

Jadine's relevance to the Afro-American woman as viewed by womanists is that she is not ready to be silenced by any man. From the very beginning, she surprises Son--even herself--when offended by Son's first attacks, calling her a "little white girl." She tells him: "Just because you're black you can come here and give me orders?" (121). Jadine is "surprised by the steadiness of her own voice and even more surprised that he did it" (122). She does not acknowledge any weakness to Son, as she says "I think you better throw me out the window because as soon as you let me loose I am going to kill you" (121). She gives a serious warning to Son because, even if she does not do it, he is supposed to know that she is not ready to make sacrifices for

him. Morrison dramatizes this in a dog metaphor, where the bitch bears the dog's whole weight in the middle of the street while other dogs are waiting for the first to be through and mount her in turn, she who endures only because she was "in heat" (123-24). Jade wants an equal share of life with her partner.

Jadine can say No, and in the end, she even fights Son. In fact, Son appears to be like the New York City men he sees himself, walking without looking either right or left to avoid crying black girls. It enhances Jadine's feeling that she is utterly responsible for herself. After she has made sure that they cannot stay together because of Son's ignorance and repeated abuses, she decides to drop him once and for all, in order to start something anew. Unlike Margaret who remains attached to Valerian, Jadine feels a great relief when she shows a man that she can challenge his patriarchal values. Her firm decision is a serious blow to Son, as he thinks of what to do: Now, "whatever she wants, I have to do it, want it. But first I have to find her" (273), he thinks. Since he cannot live without her, at least Jadine is victorious to such an extent that as she goes to Isle des Chevaliers and then to France feeling "lean and male" (275), he sets off to Isle des Chevaliers to look for her, recognizing her strength:

'Let her go ?' . . . Because she has a temper, energy, ideas of her own and fought back? Let go a woman whose eyebrows were a study, whose face was enough to engage attention of your life? Let go a woman who was not only a woman but a sound, all the music he had wanted to play, a world and a way of being in it? Let *That* go? 'I can't,'

he said. 'I can't. ' (298-99)

She makes him go back to the briar patch which apparently welcomes him. Indeed, Thérèse leads him to the wild side of Isle des Chevaliers and, although he is uncertain of finding l'Arbe de la Croix, as he asks her: "Are you sure ?" ,i.e., sure that it is the Island/that there are savages waiting for him, "the trees stepped back a bit as if to make the way easier for a certain kind of man. Then he ran. Lickety-split. Lickety-split" (306). But although Jadine rejects Son, when she appears last in the novel, she may think of much to do and great things to become, but she will hardly forget him, at least for his sexuality. Jadine in the end of the novel is free from black male domination, but unfortunately in dropping black men she loses what she could have gained from Afro-American culture, and identifies completely with the white one. She fails because she simplifies things and does not distinguish between good and bad in the Afro-American values.

Jadine is not trustworthy for she lacks courage to figure out who she really is; and that to a certain extent she needs a man like Son to settle down and complete ~~herself~~ in time both lack viable communities to which they belong. Jadine praises material success at the expense of maternity and values of the ancient women like sharing and nurturing. She could be both a good and wealthy mother, Ondine tells her, but she fails to make her understand. Similarly, she does not understand Ondine and black women; she has a view of life diametrically opposed to Son's, and Mobley stresses this saying that "on a deeper level, the novel is about the disparity Morrison sees between women of her remembered past and the women of the present epitomized in

the character of Jadine" (662). In this sense *Tar Baby* can be interpreted as a novel which highlights the danger facing black women who aspire to a white middle-class lifestyle.

Morrison discusses those pitfalls through binary oppositions of black and white, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, husband and wife, etc., out of which Jadine fails to adopt a relevant attitude towards her cultural roots. Jadine's option, as Mobley argues, is a definition of herself against herself and her cultural past in the interest of self-fulfillment. She decides to leave Son probably because she thinks Ryk will marry her, although it is unclear whether Ryk loves her or loves any black woman.

Jadine therefore does not overcome her personal dilemmas. On the other hand, the novel ends with no idea of her settlement. She last appears on a plane bound for Paris, and the ant metaphor that Morrison uses suggests that life ahead is not so simple:

Almost all of them [soldier ants] are women and there is so much to do--the work is literally endless. So many to be born and fed, then found and buried. There is no time for dreaming, the life of their world requires organisation so tight and sacrifice so complete there is little need of males and they are seldom produced. (290)

Tar Baby is a very relevant work to the womanist field. Morrison is experimenting with the diverse alternatives black women have in their struggle to get their rights respected. Through Jadine, men and women can review their personality according to what they value and moreover, according to what they reject in her. She represents a breed of educated and successful youngsters who should carry up the Afro-American

future and support the older generations against unhappy fate, as it is said that Sydney and Ondine

had been [Jadine's] parents since she was twelve and now she was required to parent them --guide them, do the small chores that put them in touch with the outside world, soothe them, allay their fears. (91)

It is a great responsibility for Jade although she dismisses it. *Tar Baby's* relevance also lies in Jadine's determination to face black male sexism, and reject marriage which she cannot enjoy, the way Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* rejects her husbands' attempts to subject her on the basis of their sex and/or wealth. It is the same in *Sula*, where Sula accepts being an outlaw provided she is independent of men's control. These women do better by speaking their minds unafraid of the consequences unlike Nel in *Sula* who takes submission for granted and feels "her thighs . . . really empty" (110) when her best friend, Sula takes her husband Jude. At least, Sula has "discover[ed] that a lover was not a comrade and could never be--for a woman. And that no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out and touch with an ungloved hand" (121).

Jadine's failure is partly due to the lack of a strong cultural background having been uprooted by early orphanage and two adoptions, first by her submitted uncles and then by the capricious millionaire. However, through her, men can learn that there are women who can fight for their selfhood, and women are warned about the dangers awaiting them and the whole community in case of an excessive sense of independence, because they remain the "cultural bearing black women."

Jadine has essential qualities she wants, to live in the twentieth century America, i.e., beauty, material success and education. Although she is enlightened, she refuses to do the right things at her expense. Her success in rejecting male sexism is dimmed by her total rejection of her "ancient properties" from which she would draw all the vital elements of identity. As a matter of fact, she does not do better than Margaret, insofar as she contributes to undermining her future as a successful black woman.

C O N C L U S I O N .

In this thesis, I have traced the compelling roles played by racism and sexism in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*. Although Morrison depicts racist white Americans and attacks all men for their inadequacies, I find Martin Seymour-Smith's argument relevant when he says that there is no way she can be attacking whites or men in any generalized manner. But I do not find obvious his other assertion that her portraits of men are among the fullest, most sympathetic and penetrating in Afro-American Literature.

It goes without saying that in a society where race relationships have been poor, there is a strong influence of racist attitudes, and I have shown how this racial discrimination structures class distinction, especially where whites hold political and economic power. This situation is one of the main themes of Afro-American literature.

The first goal of the thesis was to show the major motivations behind Afro-American women's writing, to which the study of *Tar Baby* is related. The thesis then showed how *Tar Baby's* setting is racially divided; it is a world where human relationships are structured on two levels. First is the surface level which portrays seemingly harmonious master/servant relationships. Then at a deeper level, this apparent understanding is seen to mask a state of domination where the strong oppress the weak on all levels. This is what I term a "fragile harmony." There is in the novel a pattern of binary oppositions showing how different categories of people live in a polemicized world, on the bases of race and gender, demonstrating that the multiracial environment lacks foundations for a promising cohabitation because of too much hypocrisy on the basis of a lack of trust.

There is in *Tar Baby* a concealed struggle for power, for the white man to safeguard his privileges; the white woman, to reach her position as the master's wife; the black, to overturn the existing order of things to reach a more tolerable position and to struggle against domination. One can see in *Tar Baby*, as in many other novels by women, the evidence for the view of some feminists that in sexual relations are power relations. There is, however, a demonstration that although women want power, they are less oppressive and less able to dominate than men.

The fragility of relationships and the struggle for power are stressed by the minor incident which leads to the break up of the household, resulting in an uncontrollable turmoil that I call "the chaos." The chaos includes the fall of the white master along with the failure of his machinations. Another result is that black servants, portrayed as having nothing to lose, realize that they have contributed to their misfortune by acquiescing to their master's domination.

Tar Baby gives a close analysis of a white man in his everyday life from a black woman's point of view. Valerian's complexity and failure function to criticize racism and sexism. One notices the confusion that characterizes the oppressors, insofar as they cannot explain their actions. Not only is Valerian not expected to explain, but he cannot. Relationships are maintained by what is supposed to be "self-understood," i.e., that the black servants must be submissive to the white master and that the wife must endure the husband's illtreatment.

This thesis analyses the novel with regard to feminist ideology. Jadine, unlike many heroines, is rich, educated, and happy. But she fails to use her privileges beneficially for her

black (and female) community. Instead, she simply dismisses them by thinking that she is more advanced than they are. She fails to use her knowledge insofar as she loses her roots to identify with a world which does not understand her. Jadine's resistance to male domination is a valuable achievement, but this achievement is overpowered by her lack of interest in Afro-American culture shown by her rejection of Ondine, the one who mothered her when she was orphaned.

Tar Baby's conclusion suggests, among other things, that individual success with no community support has two effects which tend to cancel each other out. It invites black people to make sense of their identity in order not to contribute to their cultural decline. As a matter of fact, Jadine, who may stand for blacks' material and educational successes, fails to achieve what her community expects from her--understandable for someone in search of independence--but she cannot feel settled or confident of her future. The novel demonstrates that material success is not enough to achieve racial harmony and happiness. It is also a warning of the danger of the alienation which results from unclear goals. In fact, Jadine's connection with the white world is a clearly shallow relationship because although she has more of the features the white society trusts: beauty, education, money, and also loyalty, it turns out that no step is made for her integration within the white world. On the contrary, she is the victim of an attempt to destroy her self with an unknown black man. Moreover, her adventurous attempt at self-sufficiency leads her to an identity crisis which makes her feel uncomfortable while in the black community, but especially with other black women.

In her novels, Toni Morrison reviews man/woman relationships from many vantage points in her attempt "to get at all kinds and definitions of love" (Ruas 231). It is a very important contribution to the feminist field, which still has man as the main aim. One finds in her novels that women still feel responsible for men's failures. Jadine, for example, although she is eager to achieve her independence, feels she still owes something to Son, the reason why she prefers never to see him again.

But one of *Tar Baby's* suggestions is about the consciousness about femininity and masculinity, one of the crucial issues of feminism. This would be an interesting area of research, about the evidence one has of Morrison's heroines' drive to be "male," for femininity has a negative connotation. It would be an indispensable complement to this work. Another angle of study one could undertake could be the society's inadequacies through the signification of names in Morrison's novels, as one notices how well names' meanings relate to the themes and motifs in novels, such as racism, love, and power.

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