摘 要

托妮·莫里森是首位荣获诺贝尔文学奖的黑人女作家，她的作品在世界范围内广受关注。关于她的小说，评论家往往多着眼于从文化批评的视角分析黑人文化与白人主流文化之间的关系，包括种族政治、性别歧视等问题，以及作者独特的语言风格。而对于莫里森作品中表现的黑人群体内部关系，则关注较少，尤其是男性和女性之间的错综复杂的社会关系，鲜有评论涉及。本文将尝试探索这一领域。

性别互动问题在莫里森所有作品中都有体现，以《秀拉》、《天堂》中最为集中。本文着重探讨了这两部小说中美国黑人男性与女性、女性与女性之间的复杂互动关系。

《秀拉》和《天堂》中的黑人男性并不具备白人文化模式常赋予男性的勇敢、坚强、睿智等特质，相反，往往表现得不可信赖、幼稚、肤浅。通过《秀拉》中的夏德拉克等男性形象，莫里森意在揭示，由于种族歧视的影响，常常遭受挫折的黑人男子已逐渐弱化。在白人文化统治下，黑人男子被视为异类和下等公民被剥夺了男子气概和自我意识。由白人男性控制的工作环境，常常带给黑人男子沉重的经济和社会压力，致使他们接近崩溃。这些原因致使黑人男性失去了对生活的控制权和对女人的驾驭能力，因此他们往往承担不起在家庭或两性关系中本应承担的传统责任。相反，许多男性希望从那些独立的黑人女性身上得到庇护和安慰。无论是《秀拉》中的亚甲斯，还是《天堂》中鲁比镇上的黑人男子们，都从物质和精神上依赖着身旁的女人。更为糟糕的是，黑人男性还把黑人女性作为替罪羊，将其在白人统治社会中遭受的压迫和歧视转变成对她们的暴力。在《天堂》中，莫里森通过鲁比镇男人对女修道院的杀戮，揭示出黑人男性由于自身的无能和对白人社会的不满，最终导致了他们对黑人女性的恐惧和敌对。

反观女性。由于男性力量的消减，女性对整个黑人社会的影响力逐步扩大。莫里森笔下的女性常常具有坚强、权威等原本男子才具有的气概。秀拉是其中的一个典型，她超越了以往社会中关于种族和性别的界定，是一个具备很强自我意识的独立黑人女性。此外，由于黑人女性无法从弱化的黑人男子身上获取

多少支持和帮助，所以更多地依靠姐妹情谊，通过互相帮助来抗击性别和种族压迫。《秀拉》中性格迥异的秀拉和奈尔，被对方的个性所吸引，两者之间紧密的友谊帮助她们形成一个完整的自我。此外，莫里森还从历史角度和文化角度，再塑了美国黑人母性的形象。《秀拉》中的女家长伊娃是典型的莫里森笔下的母亲形象，她打破了旧有的制度、规则，重新建立起属于自己的王国。对莫里森而言，黑人母亲由于男性的软弱和堕落，不得不自强自立，最终成为丈夫，儿子乃至整个黑人群体赖以依靠的中坚力量。

通过以上分析，本文得出结论：莫里森在两部作品中揭示了美国社会的种族歧视造成的黑人男性弱化现象。其结果是，一方面黑人女性往往比男性更自强、自立，常常成为黑人男性依附的对象；另一方面，在黑人社区中，以女性为核心的关系代替男女关系成为主要的支撑力量。

关键词：托妮·莫里森 秀拉 天堂 美国黑人 女性为核心的关系 男女关系

Abstract

Toni Morrison, the first Afro-American woman having been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, establishes her fame on a global scale. On the whole, most Morrison studies focus on racial politics, black culture, black roots, and black identity. They place Morrison's works into the whole American historical background, examining the cultural conflicts between the black and the white, or Afro-Americans' unique culture in comparison with the white culture. Few researches pay attention to the gender and cultural issues within the black community.

The present thesis attempts to study gender dynamics within the black community presented in Morrison's works in the context of racial and gender discrimination. Although gender dynamics permeates all of Morrison's works, it is most precisely examined by Morrison in *Paradise* and *Sula.*

Through analysis of these two novels, the thesis reveals that unlike heroes of the white culture who are usually described as intelligent and strong-minded, male characters in *Sula* and *Paradise* are usually untrustworthy, superficial, immature, and anonymous. Through male characters such as Shadrack in *Sula*, Morrison demonstrates that the impotence of black males results from their lack of an integral self, manhood, independence, and economic power as results of white discrimination. Overwhelmed by heavy economic and social burdens, many of them have no control over either their destiny or women, thus fail to perform the traditional male roles as providers and protectors within families and cross-gender relationships. On the contrary, many Afro-American men choose to seek protection from stronger women. Both Ajax in *Sula* and Ruby's men in *Paradise* rely heavily on women around them economically and emotionally. Worse still, some even transform the oppression imposed on them by white culture into the violence on the black women. In *Paradise*, the hostility and massacre toward the Convent by the men of Ruby, clearly reveals this point. The women at the Convent become scapegoats because their acceptance of different new ideas and economic autonomy challeng the necessity of Ruby's rigid

system of community. So they choose to destroy them. This is definitely a sign of weakness rather than potency.

Having nothing to rely on, black women show great autonomy and play more and more important roles in the Afro-American community. Many of Morrison's female characters display features of masculinity—showing great confidence and willfulness in actualizing themselves despite social discriminations. Sula is one of these typical characters who chooses to seek her individual identity and learns to define herself positively instead of just reacting against others' stereotypes. Because Afro-American women can hardly win any support from the emasculated males, they rely much on sisterhood in fighting against sexual and racial discriminations. Sula and Nel in *Sula* make a perfect example. Though different in personality, the two complement each other and help each other become complete persons.

Besides, Morrison also redefined Afro-American motherhood. Eva in *Sula* is a typical image of mother in the Morrison's works who takes on omnipotent power to lead the family and the black community. The way Eva is treated by her husband forces her to become aggressive and strong. As a result, she stands at the top of the family rank. For Morrison, elevated from female autonomy as a result of male emasculation, motherhood has become the chief prop for Afro-American sons, husbands, and even the black community.

From the above analysis, the thesis concludes that, in the two novels, Morrison reveals wide-spread emasculation of Afro-American males because of white racial discrimination. This leads to two major consequences. On the one hand, Afro-American women turn out to be more independent and strong-minded than males and become supporters for many males; on the other hand, female-centered relationships—sisterhood and motherhood—have become the mainstream in the Afro–American life instead of cross–gender relationships.

Key words: Toni Morrison, *Sula*, *Paradise*, Afro-Americans, female-centered relationship, cross-gender relationship

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Chapter One Introduction

A celebrated female Afro-American writer, Toni Morrison has been described as a magnetic personality, a compelling voice, and a warm and amusing individual. Morrison's fiction is a good example mixing the spiritual narratives of people speaking in tongues, with historical accounts, and autobiography. Morrison won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993, the eighth woman and the first Afro-American woman to be so honored.

Toni Morrison published her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1969 which received favorable reviews by many critics of that time. It is about a lonely, black girl Pecola Breedlove who prays for blue eyes, white skin and blonde hair. Through Pecola's tragic life, Morrison criticizes the Euro-American standard of beauty and challenges white American idealization of the family from an Afro-American perspective. She shapes an image of black woman who positioned at the lowest status in a white and male dominant society and discovers her suffering under the white cultural dominance. Later, in 1973 Morrison published *Sula*, which spans five decades, from 1919, when World War I veteran Shadrack returns to the Bottom to 1965, when many original residents of the Bottom either have died or moved elsewhere. In *Sula*, Morrison portrays many female figures with strong mind and male images of impotence. Different from *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* fixes more attention on motherhood, female relationship and new black women. In 1977 Morrison published *Song of Solomon*, which is framed by the Afro-American vernacular tradition of the flying America. It differs from Morrison's previous two novels in that the narrative centers around the experiences of a man protagonist. *Tar Baby* is the first novel by Morrison that is not limited in a small community of Afro-Americans living in the Midwest. It focuses on the conflict between a modern black girl, Jadine, who follows white American cultural values and her boyfriend, Son, who is rooted in the traditional

culture. *Beloved, Jazz* and *Paradise* are viewed as a trilogy by Morrison. In *Beloved* (1987) Morrison breaks with the realism of slave narratives by making an image of a female ghost. In *Jazz* (1991) Morrison makes attempt to reconstruct the collectivity among the Afro-Americans through exploring the complex relationship between Joe, Violet and Felice. *Paradise* is Morrison's seventh novel, which discovers interracial racism and male-female conflict for readers. At the end of the novel, some male citizens of Ruby murder all the women in the Convent because they fear the women's power and authority.

In addition to the novels, Morrison has created many important critical works. Her first book of criticism, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), which constituted by three essays challenges the portrayal of black characters in the American literary canon. She illustrates that most of those who immigrated to America were repressed politically, religiously, or economically in their old countries. Although they tried to leave behind their old world fear of repression, it consistently haunted them even in the new world. Later, Morrison edited *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (1992) and she discusses the race, gender, politics and power structures in America as they have developed during Morrison's career as a writer. A further edited work, *Birth of a Nationhood: Gaze, Script and Spectacle in the O.J.Simposon Case* (1997) offers us how concepts of black identity in America are located in a complex race politics and institutionalized power structure.

Considerable researches have been done on Morrison both at home and abroad. There are more than 70 foreign critical books and collections of essays on Morrison's works in National Library of China alone. These works provide us with many detailed analysis of her works both in terms of style and ideological tendency. Many interpreted Morrison's works from the perspective of cultural studies. For example, Marc C. Conner, in *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*, points out that analysis of Morrison's fictions lies on not only the racial politics but also her artistic achievement. According to Conner, in *Sula* Morrison portrays the

black, female artist figure as an urgently rebellious figure and she deconstructs the conditions that are necessary for the black, female artist to find a form.

Others approach her fiction from the perspective of postmodernism. John N. Duvall's *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* is one good example for it. Duvall divides Toni Morrison into two acts: the first four novels focus on racial authenticity and the later three novels concerning a postmodern awareness of the identity of blacks. Duvall considers that *Paradise* is a mixture of Morrison's religious thinking, historical analysis, and deconstruction of racism.

Still many others, especially black literary critics, interpret Morrison's works from the perspective of black feminism. In the 1960s and 1970s, black women as individuals and in collectives began to call for transformative black feminism. Many black female writers and critics focus on black feminism that resists the institutionalized language of poststructuralist theory and find its power in the emergence of Black Art Movement. Aoi Mori examines Morrison's works from a black feminist perspective in her *Toni Morrison and Womanist Discourse*. The author observes Morrison's texts, essays, and interviews as well as other critiques of Morrison to theorize Afro-American women's everyday experiences and practices, which have been largely neglected by other male critics. In the third chapter of this book, Mori points out that Morrison displays the process of the new black women's search of identities for the readers through picturing a rebellious female image of Sula.

In China, Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun's *Gender, Race and Culture: Toni Morrison and American Black Literature of the Twentieth Century* is the first and perhaps the only completed academic book on Morrison so far. The authors of this book demonstrate Morrison's theme of Afro-American history and spiritual world through discussion of her eight novels. They analyze the traumatic looses of Afro-Americans under the influence of the white cultural dominance in *Sula*. But many articles on Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Paradise* have been published in some

influential magazines such as *Foreign Literatures*, *Foreign Literature Review*, and *Foreign Literature Studies*, etc. Most of these critiques are done from the perspective of black feminism. Such as *On the Ethnic Feminism in the Fictions of Toni Morrison* by Wang Jinping, *The Interpretation of Sula from the Feminism Perspective: Comments on the Image of Sula in Toni Morrison's Sula* by Xue Yuxiu and *Seeking for a Paradise for Black Women: An Analysis of Toni Morrison's Paradise* by Shen Yanyan. These authors fix their attentions on the suffering of black women under the dual social oppression and present how the black women seek for the new identity without concerning the gender dynamics among the blacks.

On the whole, most of these studies focus on racial politics, black culture, black roots, and black identity. They place Morrison's works into the whole American historical background, examining the cultural conflicts between the black and the white, or Afro-Americans' unique culture in comparison with the white culture. Few researches pay attention to the gender and cultural issues within the black community. Different from the researches above, this paper attempts to study gender dynamics within the black community presented in Morrison's works in the context of racial and gender discrimination. Although gender dynamics permeates all of Morrison's works, it is most precisely examined by Morrison in *Paradise* and *Sula*.

Through the analysis of these two novels, the thesis intends to argue that: 1) unlike heroes of the white culture who are usually innocent and strong-minded, male characters in these two novels are invariably untrustworthy, superficial, immature, and anonymous as a result of racial discrimination; 2) contrary to the image of suffocated white women imprisoned by men, Afro-American women in these novels show great confidence and willfulness in actualizing themselves despite social discriminations; 3) for Morrison, female-centered relationship—sisterhood and motherhood—become the mainstream in the Afro-American community instead of cross-gender relationship, due to the emasculation of Afro-American males.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is the Introduction. The author gives a brief introduction to Morrison's writing career and states the chief

arguments of the thesis at the close of a brief literature review. Chapter Two shows the reader how Morrison attempts to display the emasculate characteristics of black maleness in *Sula* and *Paradise*. Lacking community, family, love, and self, Morrison's Afro-American males have lose their maleness and are unable to fulfill the conventional "male" role of supporting and protecting their family. She illustrates the impotence of Afro-American males by revealing their incomplete self, dependence, and censure on black women.

Chapter Three analyzes in detail gender dynamics in the two novels. In Morrison's fictional world, women are at the center of the Afro-American community. In contrast with impotent male characters, many of Morrison's female characters display a kind of maleness—showing their autonomy and independence. She cherishes sisterhood and motherhood as the mainstream of the Afro-American community.

Last chapter is the conclusion of the whole thesis. From the above analysis, the paper restates the thesis, that is, Toni Morrison fixes her attention on subjects previously marginalized in literature: the powerful role played by female-centered relationship in black community as a result of emasculation of the black males.

Chapter Two Emasculated Afro-American Males

One distinct feature of gender dynamics in *Sula* and *Paradise* is the unusual silence of the black males. Unlike heroes of the white culture who are usually strong-minded and protective, male characters in these two novels are very often untrustworthy, superficial, immature, and anonymous, driven with complex, fragmented and unspeakable thought. They have no control over the occurrences. Neither do they have any authority over the narrative of those events. Some even take on characteristics of feminine. Shadrack in *Sula* is a typical example. In contrast, Morrison's female characters are often given powerful names, such as Sula, Hannah and Eva, and show great confidence and willfulness in actualizing themselves. They are "lawless", resist controls, enjoy sex for its own sake and regard it as the reflection of their own power. Consequently, male and female relationships in Morrison's works are upside-down compared with those in other cultures.

Morrison explores the reasons for such kind of distorted gender dynamics. For her, the impotence of black males results from their lacking of an integral self, of manhood, independence, and economic power. Their violent actions against women are based on fear and anxieties about feminine power.

Though sounds arbitrary, it is improper to dismiss this phenomenon simply as a case of feminist discrimination against the male because it reflects, to a large extent, distorted gender dynamics in the black community. In this chapter, the author of this thesis will investigate into the reasons for the impotence of Afro-American males and its phenomena.

2.1. Emasculation of Afro-American Males because of White Abuse

Morrison opens *Sula* with a myth of the Bottom community of Medallion, Ohio. "A joke. A nigger joke. That was the way it got started. Not the town, of course, but

that part of town where the Negroes lived, the part they called the Bottom in spite of the fact that it was up in the hills" (Morrsion, 1973: 4). A white farmer promises his slave freedom and land if he completes some difficult chores. The white man tricks the slave that the hilly bottom is rich and fertile. So the originating story of bottom community carries them the shame. The black males in Sula, influenced by their inferior racial status, hardly achieve complete selfhood.

Shadrack is a typical emasculated male figure in the fiction, whose sense of self is shattered. The traumatic war experience of Shadrack's mirrors the historical traumas taken on Afro-American men in a racist society. Before becoming U.S solider fighting in French, he is a fishman and jester in the Bottom. America entered the First World War in April, 1917. Many Afro-American men went to the war because of the American government's false propaganda and tempting commitments. Afro-Americans hope to gain economic and social equality through participating the war. But in fact, black soldiers were not equally treated with white soldier. Shadrack's war experience turned out to be a disaster. During the war, he was wounded and experienced a lot of horrible things. He had seen one of his fellow soldiers' head blown up into pieces. While hospitalized, he was left alone helplessly among white doctors and nurses to brood over his comrade's decapitation. He constantly feared that his body would also be disintegrated. In the end, he lost his mind and his contact with the outside world.

To be worse, alienated by the white dominant culture, he had also lost his identity. In the hospital, Shadrack is never called his real name by the white medical staff in a hospital when he was injured in the war. "Private" is the name given to him by these white nurses and doctors. Shadrack was puzzled with this new name and he "wanted desperately to see his own face and connect it with the word 'private' —who helped bind him) had called him"(Morriosn, 1973:10). He loses his own name for his racial rank, inferior military. Then he becomes confused and painful for a sense of loss. In Shadrack's "darkness" increasingly exposes and characterizes the fragmented and confused identities of himself in terms of his physical and spiritual distance from

American mainstream culture.

When this weak, hot and frighten young solider escapes from hospital, he feels he is "nothing". As a traumatized individual, Shadrack represents a black man's view of his own race. Shadrack recognized his deficiency and insignificance from his war experience. He is an object with "no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket, hand chief, no rug, no bed, no can opener, no faded postcard, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing nothing to do..."(Morrison, 1973: 12).

With Shadrack, Morrison shows the impact of shame and trauma on Afro-American males under a white controlled culture. Within such a social context, Afro-Americans are defined as racially inferior and stigmatized Other and become the targets of the white discrimination and violence. Shadrack suffers disturbances not only in self-regulation but also in self-esteem and self-representation as a result of trauma. The white Americans have forced black Americans to conform to the detriment of black interpersonal, familial, and communal relationships.

Back to the Bottom, Shadrack is still tormented by the memories of war, especially the shame. The process of Shadrack's search for selfhood is driven by its exploration of the impact of white ideologies on the black community. He perceives himself as deeply flawed and defective or as bad individuals or as failure. As a shamed individual, he experiences a brief moment of painful feeling. With a heightened sense of self-consciousness, shame sufferers may feel inhibited, inferior, incompetent, dirty, scorned and ridiculed by others. Shame is always associated with the feeling of chagrin, embarrassment, mortification, lowered self-esteem, disgrace and humiliation. Shame is a multidimensional, complex experience. Shame has profound consequences for individuals in daily interactions with others. In daily interaction, pride originates from deferential. Unlike that, shame comes from lack of disrespect. The Afro-Americans are always judged by white American society as inferior. They have to endure the stigma of being different. The sense of difference and inferior imposed by the dominant white culture make the black male lost their

manhood. Like other males in the Bottom, he has confusion about his own position in the family and community. He and the other residents in the Bottom are still at the bottom of American society, largely forgotten.

On the other hand, because of Shadrack's psychological sickness, he is regarded as an outsider and weirdo, "the other" in the black community. He has some habits, which are abnormal in the eyes of local citizens, such as ringing a cowbell and dangling a hanging rope in January third annually. His uncommon insight also separates him from the rest of the people in Bottom. He can see clearly the horrors of life as a sensitive poet. However, he loses his ability to communicate in a language they understand. Therefore, people in Bottom consider him as an "otherness". As his name suggests that he is under "shadow" or "dark side" power.

Shadrack's disorientation mirrors the situation of Afro-Americans in twentieth century. Unlike Sula, who goes through adventure to seek an identity for herself, Shadrack tends to escape from reality rather than find his own identity. He makes attempt to discover his identity by means of the water in a toilet bowl. "There in the toilet water he saw a grave black face. A black so definite, so unequivocal, it astonished him. He had been harboring a skittish apprehension that he was not real—that he didn't exist at all. But the blackness greeted him with its indisputable presence"(Morrison, 1973:13). Identifying him with the ugly water in the toilet, he feels his self-image is odd or absent. As Morrison mentioned, blackness is itself a stain and unstainable. This scene presents as the recognition of his inferior racial identity.

Failing to rationalize his chaotic experience, Shadrack makes attempt to create a small orderly and predictable world that he can handle so as to control his fear of death. For example, his small cabin is always unusually tidy and clean, just like a girl's. Since the death is unpredictable, he set up a National Suicide Day so that it can be timed.

Besides, Shadrack curses the white men to relieve his discontent. "The terrible Shad who walked about with his penis out, who peed in front of ladies and

girl-children, the only black who could curse white people and get away with it..."(Morrison, 1973:61). Morrison presents Shadrack's ultimate self-destructive behavior as a resistance to the white oppressors. He only can "provisional control his fear of disintegration through his obsessively well ordered cabin and his ritual of National Suicide Day, measures that parallel the Bottom's collective ability to control its traumas by incorporating whatever evils confront it"(Page, 1995:171). Like Nel, a traditional black woman, his room is well arranged.

When Sula encounters Shadrack in his orderly cabin, she feels nothing but terror and fear. She is immediately shocked by the contrast between the chaotic Shadrack and the peaceful and orderly cabin. As his only visitor, Sula can insight into his complex psychological and physical self. She is speechless at that time of emotional crisis. In *Sula*, we find that Shadrack treasures the purple and white belt that Sula lost as she ran from his cabin as "the one piece of evidence that he once had a visitor in his house" (Morrison, 1973:156). When Shadrack finds Sula in his home and rather than scolding her, he "nodded his head as though answering a question, and said, in a pleasant conversational tone, a tone of cooled butter..." (Morrison, 1973:62). He says "always" so that "she would not have to be afraid of the change—the falling away of skin, the drip and slide of blood, and the exposure of bone underneath. He had said 'always' to convince her, assure her, of permanency" (Morrison, 1973:157). For Shadrack, Sula is his woman, his daughter, and his friend. Her female essence can balance his experience of war and his fear of death.

Through Shadrack, Morrison shows the readers the struggles of Afro-American men to find their masculinity under extreme pressure. Only Shadrack's madness represents a power, which stands outside a social frame of reference. He has been lost himself in the white dominant society by following their definition of man. The obstacles he faces in his process of achieving his manhood are the models he follows. He needs someone who can guide him in his search for selfhood and manhood. But no men among the blacks can do it.

Part from Shadrack, the Deweys in the same novel are also typical emasculated Afro-American males. They lose their place, slip out of control, and move into a sheer absence of relationship. Their quite undifferentiated characteristics imply that racism prevents the development of the Afro-Americans.

2.2. Male Dependence on Women in Afro-American Community

In an essay entitled "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", Hortense. J. Spillers argues that "Because of this peculiar American denial, the black American male embodies the only American community of males which has had the specific occasion to learn who the female is within itself, the infant child who bears the life against the could-be fateful gamble, ... It is the heritage of the mother that the Afro-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood—the power of yes to the female within" (Spillers, 2000: 85). This is also what readers find in Morrison's two novels. The relationship between men and women in Morrison's fictions tends to be distorted. Females are presented as the soul supporter and nurturer of Afro-American men and the whole race.

This is a consequence of black history in the United States. During history, black women strived to survive the same ordeal inflicted on men in order to challenge racial oppression. They established a strong autonomy and a relationship with men. For Morrison, black women are much more suited to aggressiveness in the mode that feminists are recommending, because they have always been both mother and laborer, mother and worker. The history of black women in the States is an extremely painful and shameful experience, but this history also mirrors black women's unique characteristics. They do not stay at the house. Most of them work in the fields along with the black men and turn out to be emotionally stronger than many males.

As analyzed in the previous section, most male figures in Morrison's woks fail to construct an integral self. Heavy economic and social pressure overwhelms them. They have no meaningful work and lack confidence. In a way, they are still children whose selfhoods are frail. Suffering from self-pity, many of them tend to depend on women who are emotionally stronger.

2.2.1. Ajax in *Sula*

In this respect, Ajax in *Sula* is a typical image. In life, he loves only two things: one is the feminine power represented by Sula and his mother; the other is flight. Image of flight in Morrison's fiction represents freedom and ambition. Morrison's male characters intend to imagine themselves in flight and love the feeling of the process. Ajax loves his mother and "after her—airplanes. There was nothing in between"(Morrison, 1973:126). Since he cannot really fly in freedom and ambition, he put all his hope on the help that he may get from black women.

His immaturity and dependence resulted partly from his the dominance of his mother. His mother is described as "an evil conjure woman, blessed with seven adoring children whose joy it was to bring her the plants, hair, underclothing, fingernail parings, white hens, blood, camphor... She knew about the weather, omens, the living, the dead, dreams and all illnesses and made a modest living with her skills"(Morrison, 1973:126). In his life, nobody could replace his mother.

So he grows up under the influence of powerful women. Their protections enable him to enjoy a sense of security. Though well over 20, he has no practical ambitions. Instead, he takes strong boyish interests in milk and butterflies. He sees Sula as someone who can mother him. When he first visits Sula he brings a bottle of milk, which he drinks by himself. This episode suggests that Sula is only a surrogate for his mother. Most of images of mother-women make the sons return to the infancy and usurp their masculinity. In that case he could not make lasting commitments to anyone else. Because of his lack of selfhood, his identity is deflated from the heroic to the common warrior Albert Jacks.

Anyhow, his tender, passive, and pleasant characteristics make him a perfect match temporarily for Sula. In fact, he is the only male character that is attracted to Sula. As if waiting for mother's exclamation, he brings her many excellent and impractical gifts "clusters of black berries still on their branches, four meal fried porgies wrapped in a salmon colored sheet of the Pittsburgh Courier, a handful of jacks, two boxes of lime Jell—Well, a hunk of ice-wagon ice...more gleaming white

bottles of milks"(Morrison, 1973: 125).

On the other hand, Sula is against the lessons her grandmother taught her and keeps a nontraditional relationship with Ajax. For her, the relationship between she and Ajax is not only based on physical and sexual action but also the spiritual wholeness. Sula is attracted by Ajax, because she can display her tough and wise character facing him. Unlike her previously relationship with other men, she feels a real pleasure when with Ajax. He is a good listener. And most of all, he is the one who truly understands her. As time goes by, she begins to have a strong will to make Ajax dependent on her.

But how can you expect such an immature man to have sense of responsibility? Ajax's fascination with planes embodies he attempts to fly from the burden of a permanent role as husband and father. Eventually, Ajax walks out of her life and leaves her nothing. Their relationship ends when Ajax finds Sula's over possessiveness. When Sula wants to love a man for the first time and to protect him from the cruel society, he leaves her. He left his driver's license that seems to prove his existence in Sula's life. It is not until this time that Sula has found out that his real name is Albert Jacks. "Albert Jacks? His name was Albert Jacks? A. Jacks. She had thought it was Ajax. All those years, Even from the time she walked by the pool hall and looked away from him sitting astride a wooden chair, looked away to keep from seeing the wide space of intolerable orderliness between his legs, the openness that held no sign, no sign at all..."(Morrison, 1973:135). As a symbol of Ajax, the driver license signals absence. He is unable to achieve his transcendence and claim his manhood.

Ajax's absence is very significant for Sula for a while. "His absence was everywhere, stinging everything, giving the furnishing primary colors, sharp outlines to the corners of rooms and gold light to the dust collecting on the table tops"(Morrison, 1973:134). But at the end of the novel, when Nel accuses her for never being able to keep a man, Sula replies: "They ain't worth more than me. And besides, I never loved no man because he was worth it. Worth didn't have nothing to

do with it" (Morrison, 1973:144).

2.2.2. Other Cases

Another example is Jude who wants "a someone sweet, industrious and loyal to shore him up" (Morrison, 1973: 83). He lacks a full identity because the social system dominated by the white denies him a satisfactory job. In his desperation to gain a full self, he chooses Nel in the delusion that "the two of them together would make one Jude"(Morrison, 1973: 83). He is so vulnerable that tries to find a woman who can replace his mother and his own absent identity. The woman would be someone to care about his hurt, to care very deeply. Jude is an economically emasculated man who expects Nel to smoothen him and to support him spiritually and physically. He expects his life experience to "dovetail into milkwarm commiseration" (Morriosn, 1973:103).

Nel dreams an invisible and ethereal man who can take her away from the bleakness surrounding her. She dreams of lying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for some fiery prince. He approached but never quite arrived. But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling sympathetic eyes. Someone as interested as she herself in the flow of her imagined hair, the thickness of the mattress of flowers, the voice sleeves that closed below her elbows in gold-threaded cuffs. (Morrison, 1973:51) But no one including Jude can come close to her and end her loneliness. The black men cannot easily love a black woman when they are so unsure of their commitment and loyalty. The hostility that black men receive from the white seems to be everywhere in their life—both in their relationship with women and that between each other, though in other forms.

2.3. Afro-American Males' Abuse of Women

In *Paradise*, Morrison shows the impact of racist violence and racial contempt on the experience of Afro-Americans. Men of Ruby follow their ancestors' search for manhood. They try to behave like men of masculinity. However, their manhood is distorted by the white masculinity discourse and white dominant society. So in the end, many of them seek to re-establish their male authority which has been deprived

by white racial discrimination through abusing the females.

To avoid social oppressions imposed on them, the black males do utmost to free themselves. They built the all black town, Ruby. The town is made up of descendents of former slaves who make attempt to escape from the racial and economic oppression they experienced during slavery and Reconstruction. However, there are many contradictory elements that have occurred in its community since its foundation. In this novel Morrison focuses on black male inability to relegate certain experiences to fully integrated memory rather than traumatic occurrence. The citizens in Ruby have deeply influenced by the racism. The dark-skinned families of Ruby regard the light-skinned people as corrupted and impure Afro-Americans. In conventional fiction, paradise is viewed as a place, which presents men's sovereign. Here, Morrison shows the complexity and failure of the male images in *Paradise*. Although they are aware of their oppressed status, they also realize they have no power to change. Initially, the men in *Paradise* intend to escape the suffering situation by establishing an autonomous, all-black community. They want to reject the dominating social influences of white racism. The men of Ruby in *Paradise* actually could not remove the unresolved trauma. They fail to establish a covenanted community in an inhospitable western landscape.

By adopting the American creeds and religious typology present in the Puritan origins of the United States, the community of Ruby reproduces the discrimination, isolationist, hegemonic and violent character of American society. Morrison depicts an Afro-American community practices its citizens in principles of separateness and superiority.

Even though Ruby is a town where a "sleeping woman could always rise from her bed" and "sit on the steps in the moonlight" because "Nothing for ninety miles around thoughts she was prey" (Morrison, 1998:8), Morrison critiques the sacrifices and exclusions that were made to ensure this apparent safety. Although this all-black town was originally established to protect fully Afro-Americans' civil rights, the town leaders wind up killing and oppressing women, deliberately setting high interest rates

that divide town members by socioeconomic class, and punishing individuals without "blue black" skin. The traditional ideology in Ruby places the male (father or husband) as the decision maker in a family or a community. Being a protector in a family, the man would enjoy having power over his wife or daughter.

Morrison reveals that unsatisfying relationships between Afro-American men and women are often caused by the defeats males suffer from white discrimination. To relieve their misfortune, they often find various scapegoats within their own community. As a consequence of racial and social shaming, the men in Ruby have hostile attitude toward the women in Convent. For men in *Paradise*, they need to control female behavior and to shape them into an affirmation of black masculinity. This need for absolute control over women makes the men of Ruby suspicious and hostile towards the Convent Women. These group women who exist beyond their control on the margins of their community increase their frustration in the white male center society.

For the men of Ruby, the Convent challenges their concept of their masculinity and is the cause for all the problems of Ruby. For Ruby's men, their expectalism and sense of freedom lies in their genetically pure African heritage. Both of the second and third generation men of the community were threatens by change. The citizens of Ruby intends to eliminate further oppression by establishing a rigid, isolate social system that avoid any new ideas, values, or ethnicities to interfere with their sense of racial pride and community. The women at the Convent become scapegoats because their acceptance of different ideas, ethnicities and economic autonomy challenge the necessity of Ruby's rigid system of community. The convent community founded by Consolata provides women with autonomy, independent living and equal voice with men. The women's ability to clean their past traumas reflects the failure of the citizens of Ruby to confront their own traumatic histories. They could not take the matters into their own hands.

For Morrison, hegemonic American ideologies of masculinity belong to the white male and black men are under the heavy depression. *Paradise* implies that

women, black or white, can deal with the pain and humiliation of mental abuse better than male. The men of Ruby lose their superiority over the black women. So they move their fear of outside into the women of the Convent who become the community scapegoats. The men in Ruby think that domesticity should be the women's duty: "Quiet white and yellow houses full of industry; and in them were elegant black women at useful tasks; orderly cupboards minus surfeit or miserliness; linen laundered and ironed to perfection; good meat seasoned and ready for roasting" (Morriosn, 1998: 111). This male perspective represents the long history of the oppression of women. Therefore, the men of Ruby try to find evidence of a neglect of domestic duties to be justification for their massacre toward the Convent. The women of the Convent destroy the system of male-centered society and recreate a solid world of woman.

In *Paradise*, readers will focus on the complex lives of her female characters. Convent women become the mythic presence instead of men absence. The women in the Convent "don't need men and they don't need God" (Morriosn, 1998:276). In effect, the male in Ruby are outraged by the idea that these women lead life without men or the Christian God.

When the group of women refuses to accept the males' protection, the men become ashamed and angry. The male citizens of the town begin to feel threatened when a group of women of different economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds start to gather together at a former convent 17 miles outside of Ruby. Although, the people of Roby know their Convent neighbors are strange but harmless, they fear their power over the males. Like the original residents of Heaven and Ruby, these women are the outcasts of the society. Different from male citizens of Ruby the women in the Convent eventually find their power and identities. So at the end of the novel, Morrison illustrates the inhumane and brutal qualities of man for fearing losing their dominant position in the society.

And ultimately Ruby males scapegoat a group of unconventional women for its internal problems. In effect, the town of Ruby actively sees the Convent as a

dangerous separatist space in order to keep the convent women outside its own boundaries. The plot of the novel culminates in a horrific massacre conducted by these two groups of men on a group of unconventional women living in the Convent. When Convent becomes the repository of the scandalous secrets of the respectable 8-rocks, the men find shame and potential danger in the Convent women. Like Pandora myth, the Convent is also a prototype for the femme fatale for the men of Ruby. According to males of Ruby, a seductive female appearance that is appealing and charming to man generates its polar opposite, an interior that is harmful and dangerous to man. Deacon Morgan born in 1924 is the grandson of Zechariah 'Big Papa' Morgan and a leader of "fifteen families" who established Ruby. Deacon Morgan seems to be a proud and respectable man in Ruby. He regards the Convent as the entrance of hell. Once he had sexual relationship with one of the Convent women, Consolata. During their sexual affair Consolata bit Deacon's lip and licked the blood from it. After that Deacon looks Consolata as sexually savage and a kind of female animal. Her initiative actions cause Deacon's frustration on physically and psychologically. He ends the relationship between Consolata because he thinks this relationship threaten Ruby's social structure as well. Deacon does not reconcile his patriarchal life view and his ideals of morality and stability with the women in the Convent because this group of women is a threat for his authority and the community he established. Although Deacon is not physically stronger than his twin, he is morally stronger than his brother. After the murder, he begins to realize that the isolated and unchangeable new community they make attempt to create under patriarchal control and violence is impossible. When he walks barefoot to Richard Misner's house in a reenactment of his grandfather's 200-mile barefoot walk from Louisiana to Mississippi, he finds nothing he has searched. Steward Morgan is the twin of Deacon Morgan. Steward and his wife Dovery have no ability to have children, so he transforms his patriarchal expectation of the future into his nephew. Steward focuses on his position in the community and the history of his family. Like his twin, he cannot tolerate the change in the Ruby and challenge of the masculine

women in the Convent. Black women are viewed as racial and sexual Other and debased. As an insecure man, he constantly claims his manhood by his violent behavior towards the female. He and other men think all the troubles of Ruby come from the Convent women. They view the Convent women as nasty women who draw Ruby people into the Convent like "flies to shit". The innocence of moral for men in Ruby refers not to a virtuous heart, but a male fantasy of pure, unadulterated, intact selfhood and sovereign will, untainted by the intrusion of shame. The male citizens see the women as bad, a wayward influence on their moral lives.

At the end of the novel they want to affirm that they possess the masculine ability to impose their will on their environment through the gun violence. The massacre of the Convent women is a response of male to an intolerably shameful sense of loss of control over their town. In the Convent, there is no violation of the feminine world of daughters and mothers by the Oedipal law. From the men's perspectives, the women, like Eve, embody a loss of innocence. So when women live communally without men, they live outside of the black shameful history and men centered culture. They live a happy and healthy life beyond masculine law and order. The description of the women at the end of the first chapter clarifies the irony of the men's actions. The men want to protect the paradise. Ironically, the men become what they wish to destroy, and thus they destroy their paradise. Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas are refugees from the male centered society and they find the happiness in the Convent. Contrasted with Ruby's residents, these women appear more vivacious and powerful. Therefore, the town of Ruby is penetrated with the fear of women in Convent. The Convent's "stinging hot peppers" may be equated with the fires of Hell, and the Convent itself is described like a "live cartridge" and "deadly"(Morrison, 1998:8). The men in *Paradise* are eager to dismiss independent women as sluts or witches, and determined to make them submit to their will. The men of Ruby want to reach the moral perfection. One of killers blames the Convent Women for calling "into question the value of almost every woman he knew" (Morrison, 1998:8). The Convent Women outrage the men by reminding them of their lack of total self-control.

These Innocent people harm their community under the guise of righteousness in the novel. They attack these women because of illicit desires, traumatic memories, and shameful experiences. Killing the women is an action for eliminating intolerable internal shame and fulfills their self-identity. Their male ego is greatly hurt. Morrison presents the men's weakness for the readers: as adulterers, drunks, liars, would-be murderers of unborn children, and men expressing emotional needs and sexual desires not endorsed by their rigid code of behavior. The white oppression denied manhood to black males. Therefore, Afro-American males try to confirm their notion of white masculinity by means of scapegoating black women.

Besides, Morrison depicts some black male figures who feel frustration and lack manliness comparing with women in *Sula*. They try to reclaim black manhood which is based on black men's violence and domination over their women and children. In *Sula,* Morrison shows the humiliations taken on Eva during her early in her marriage with BoyBoy. For BoyBoy, "did whatever he could that he liked, and he liked womanizing best, drinking second, and abusing Eva third"(Morrison, 1973:32). Eva plays a shameful and vicitimized role in her relationship with BoyBoy. When BoyBoy abandoned her, he only leaves her $ 1.65, five eggs, three beets and three young children. Abandoned by her husband, BoyBoy, (whose name suggests infantile character) Eva is forced to be independent and support three children on her own. She unloads her children to her neighbor for eighteen months for her destitution. When she comes back, she only has one leg, but she can provide for her family with enough economic supply. Defeated by his quest for power and identity, BoyBoy projects his frustrations onto his wife, who then changes her anger at him into fuel for meanness of his life.

Chapter Three Female-Centered Black Community

The majority of the characters in Morrison's fiction are female, who are far more interested in issues, which affect their lives personally than on the large question of Afro-Americans and black community's destiny. They concerned the problems such as how to find a job, save enough money, foster children, deal with a spouse (or life without a spouse), and maintain personal dignity in the face of routine oppression and prejudice. However, from these kinds of tiny things, black women become the mainstream in the black community. By placing women at the center of her novels, Morrison takes a historical approach in order to reconstruct Afro-American culture.

For her, social discrimination and diminishment of black male to some extent produce the more aggressive black mothers and wives. Many of her female characters are provided with male characteristics. For Morrison, a woman's identity is not entirely defined by her demeanor toward her husband. Her fiction claims the right of female self-representation.

3.1. Sula, a Female Character with Features of Masculinity

In literary works produced in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Afro-American women are often presented as victims of oppression. Morrison began writing *Sula* in 1969, a time of great activism among Afro-Americans and a time when black female were striving for equal civil rights and opportunities. The trinity of women who share the spotlight in *Sula*—Sula, Eva, and Nel, have lots in common in the worldview. They alter the traditional depiction of black women and break the stereotypes and myths in Afro-American literature, especially Sula.

Her name recalls the name of Saul in Bible. Although Sula is not exactly Saul, she is a prophetic, as well as an apocalyptic character. Although Sula is influenced by the black shame and trauma, she transforms the darkness and shame into a new

Afro-American identity. Described as a shameless female image, she discovers that if the oppressed Afro-American women want to escape from their oppression, they must become self-propagators.

She refuses being an object of contempt and a conventional black woman. In her eyes, the women in the Bottom: "the narrower their lives, the wider their hips. Those with husband had folded themselves into starched coffins, their sides bursting with people's skinned dreams and bony regrets. Those without men were like sour tipped needles featuring one constant empty eye" (Morrison, 1973:121). Nel admonishes Sula that she "can't act like a man". She retorts, "I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?" (Morrison, 1973:142). If black women's selves could be defined, accepted, and spoken, other aspects of their lives would slide smoothly into place.

As Morrison points out that definitions belonged to the definers, therefore Sula's male character originates from her own mark. Different from traditional women in the Bottom wait to be buried in a dull colored coffin, Sula's death represents her unique characteristic. Sula tells Nel that every colored woman in the country is dying "just like me. But the difference is their dying like a stump. I'm going down like one of those red-woods. I sure did live in this world" (Morrison, 1973:143). Sula is marked by her singularity of thoughts literally and figuratively.

It is especially in her, one finds a reversal of traditional gender roles in Toni Morrison's works. The powerful, authoritative, and muscular figures in Morrison's novels turn out to be women instead of men. Sula is a female character who changes the traditional gender role and takes on many characteristics that are usually associated with men. While a black woman is usually described by white writers as submissive, nurturing, and domestic, Morrison presents Sula as a masculine character who does the kinds of things normally only men do.

Sula performs her masculine qualities through her adventurous life. When a little girl, she is curious about all things around her and will try anything. She left the Bottom for ten years when she was a teenager and moves from one city to another

constantly in America. For Sula, she takes adventurous steps toward reclaiming her self and her voice from the world around her—from the black community and the outside of the Bottom. She willingly finds a new style of life. She is a strange in the Bottom as a wanderer. During her travels, Sula "had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover 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 to and touch with an ungloved hand"(Morrison, 1973:121). Her travel experience illustrates that she cannot find the unity she had with any of her male lovers.

In the process of finding, she is searching herself, which the black male lacks. The traditional gender code for women lived in the Bottom is to be a passive wife and a devoted mother. However, Sula refuses to be a given conventional role of obedient wife and dutiful mother. When Eva persuades her to get married and procreate children, she answers, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (Morrison, 1973:92).

When grown up, she leads a life, which deliberately challenges the conventional gender role of a black woman. She really behaves like a man, adventuresome, self-confident, and strong-minded. In her indifferent and experimental behavior, the most significant example of Sula's masculinity is her transgression of sexual laws. Sula does not respect any men and has no interest in them. She sees herself as the center of the universe. Her mother, Hannah sleeps with different men for her physical needs. Similarly, Sula is simply due to her own desire and pleasure. She is viewed as a sexual experimenter who chooses the sexual partner in the way that she likes. She picks up a man in the same way women picking up an apple in the market. For example, according to most of the residents of the Bottom, the most shameful thing a black woman does is to sleep with a white man: "They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable. In that way, they regarded integration with precisely the same venom that white people did" (Morrison, 1973:113). This point comes from the white

dominant cultural values. The lynching of Afro-American men at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century often occurred in some way because of imagined or actual transgressions of beliefs held by whites concerning black-white sexual interactions. However, for Sula, the sexual relationship with men is not shameful, and not associated with money or necessarily with marriage, but natural. She is shameless on her sexuality and refuses to be a traditional black wife. There are no words of love and possession in her own dictionary. Morrison wants to depict a black woman who is a part of sexual liberation from oppressive social construction during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Unlike the white perspective, Morrison shows us a new black woman with her liberated sexuality. Especially, Sula does not approve that a woman would never be on top of her man during sexual intercourse but beneath him. A man merely serves as a means for Sula. She does not care that the definition of a black woman is one who makes other people. She always sleeps with a married man. The relationship between her and black men in the Bottom is not about love but a kind of simple pleasure.

The matriarchs in Sula's family have a great influence on Sula's life style and values. Neither her grandmother (Eva) nor her mother (Hannah) is the traditional and submissive kind of woman. For example, Hannah is never doubt about her possibility of remarriage after she became a widow. She offers Sula an unconventional image of black woman and motherhood in terms of her lifestyle. Like Eva, Hannah also creates a set of her own rules including the relationship with male. "Hannah simply refused to live without the attentions of a man, and after Rekus' death had a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbors"(Morrison, 1973:42). Her sexual independence makes her become a destructive force in the Bottom. Her sexual superiority achieves a satisfaction for her like a male figure. Hannah's remark impresses on Sula's mind and urges her to strive for independence and self-pleasure. She taught Sula that she should rely on nothing but herself. It is in such a matriarchal family with absence of male, Sula develops a masculine character.

For Morrison, Sula is a model for black womanhood as she chooses to seek her individual identity and learns to define herself positively instead of just reacting against stereotypes of others. However, such a "lawless" and masculine character threatens the black men's power and authority in the community, so that she is viewed as a bad black girl from a black male's point of view because her use of power and display of independence represent a threat to men who are determined to marshal societal resources and control institution. Therefore, they consider her a "bitch".

But to a great extent, Sula's strong personality is resulted from the impotence of black men around her. The timidness of the Afro-American males makes Sula become more bold and masculine. A typical example is the traumatic incident of Chicken Little's drowning. Sula invites Chicken to overlook the world from a detached perch high in the branches of a tree. "Sula took him by the hand and coaxed him along. When they reached the base of the beech, she lifted him to the first branch, saying, 'Go on. Go. I got you'"(Morrison, 1973:59). In traditional black literary works, flight is the privilege of black males. Morrison presents Sula's active masculine qualities through climbing a tree. Climbing a tree is treated as a symbol of superiority. There is a significant contrast between active masculine Sula and submissive conventional Nel, who stays on the ground, "from their height she (Nel) looked small and foreshortened"(Morrison, 1973:60). Chicken Little is the only male character who has the privilege of flight. Sula picks up Chicken Little and swings him out over the water. "His knickers ballooned and shrieks of frightened joy startled the birds and the fat grasshoppers. When he slipped from her hands and sailed away out over the water they could still hear his bubbly laughter"(Morrison, 1973: 59). His ability to fly comes from Sula and his emasculate character gives Sula a first important chance to prove her bravery and masculinity. Later, when grown Sula returns to the Bottom, she finds most of the male citizens in Ruby are dull, false, talentless, and poor-spirited including her lover, Ajax. She fails to gain the love and soul support from the men of the Bottom. Accordingly, she transforms her illusion and dependence on men into

independence.

3.2. Sisterhood, a Strong Bond for Afro-American Women

In most cultures, marriage and other cross-gender relationships are the basics of a society, but Morrison draws attention to richer and more varied representations of black women including the stories of sisterhood because female relationships are an essential aspect of self-definition for Afro-American women.

Men's relationships are often subject of fiction, but that is not the case with female relationships. Morrison said in a conversation with Claudia Tate, "Friendship between women is special, different, and has never depicted as the major focus of a novel before *Sula*. Nobody ever talked about friendship between women unless it was homosexual, and there is no homosexuality in *Sula*. Relationships between women were always written about as though they were subordinate to some other roles they're playing"(Tate, 1994:62). In the two novels, Morrison pays special attention to the strong bonds among Afro-American women.

3.2.1. Sisterhood in *Sula*

The relationship between Sula and Nel is a good point in this case. Despite all kinds of differences, Sula and Nel complement and support each other. The two of them together could have made a wonderful single human being.

3.2.1.1. Differences between Sula and Nel

Two have different class backgrounds and personality. While Nel is a middle class girl who has strong and consistent characters, the lower class Sula is a girl who "could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes" (Morrison, 1973:53). In traditional sense, Nel is an image of goodness and Sula the representation of evil. Nel is a traditional black woman who knows how to manage the household skillfully, maintain a complaint appearance, speak properly and softly, and be faithful to her husband. She admirably plays some perfect roles: dutiful friend, respectful daughter, loyal wife, nurturing mother, and forgiving Christian woman. She knows and follows the laws and values of the community. In contrast, Sula disregards social conventions, following only her own heart and conscience.

But those categories of good and evil originate from the cultural values of male-centered society. Morrison wants to show readers that the two are quite similar in essence. If it is evil for Sula to feel excited watching Hannah dance in pain as flames melt her lovely skin, it is also evil for Nel to experience a sense of pleasure and tranquility when watching Chicken Little drowning in the water. There are good and evil qualities existing in both Sula and in Nel. Both are just natural, ordinary human beings.

3.2.1.2. Sisterhood between Sula and Nel

Sula and Nel become good friends because of common fate and complementary personalities. Both of them are the only daughter in their family and they both have distant mothers and incomprehensive fathers. Therefore, they dream of relieving from the solitude. Besides, they both discover that "they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be"(Morrison, 1973:52). It is Common fate and complementary personalities that bond them closely together.

Nel finds her identity for the first time when she witnesses her mother's attitude toward a white conductor on the train for New Orleans. After that trip, she begins to doubt about her mother's authority. She began aware that, "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me" (Morrison, 1973:28). But her self is not complete before meeting Sula. When they met for first time, both feel comfortable—"So when they met, first in those chocolate halls and next through the ropes of the swing, they felt the ease and comfort of old friends...Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on"(Morrison, 1973:52). They find "in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (Morrison, 1973:52). They can concentrate on their own perception of things and become two throats and one eye. They are so intimate that they find it difficult to distinguish "one's thoughts from the other's"(Morrsion, 1973:83).

Nel begins to acknowledge a new world that in contrast to the circumscribed one her mother has forced on her. As a half person, Sula's struggle to enjoy her full self is

alone and doomed. Sula loves the ordered Nel's home and her life. Nel loves Sula's household of disorder situation with various things, people, and voices. Sula thinks that only Nel's voice can pull her away from the dark thoughts, which take hold of her. It is also in Nel instead of a man that Sula discovers her identity.

Morrison presents Sula and Nel as perfect complements. They experience the happiness and suffering together. But Nel's marriage with Jude Greene pulls her away from her close friend. So when Nel married Jude in 1927, Sula left the Bottom. Nel's mind died when Sula leaves the Bottom and her body continues to follow the traditional experiences associated with women. Ten years later in 1937, Sula returns to the Bottom and destroys the relationship of Nel and her husband. At the end of the novel, she regains Nel's understanding and friendship. After Sula died, Nel begins to recall what she shared with Sula before she is molded into a conventional black wife and mother and begins to realize that only with Sula at her side can she become a complete person. Nel's short-lived awakening to the sense of identity suggests that herself cannot sustain her selfhood.

3.2.1.3. The Dynamics between Sisterhood and Cross-gender Relationship in Afro-American Community

Morrison also explores how cross-gender relationships affect Nel and Sula's sisterhood. Chicken Little is the first male who intrudes into life of Sula and Nel. The first time Chicken Little meets Sula and Nel is when they play with leaves and twigs, "Sula lifted her head and joined Nel in the grass play. In concert, without ever meeting with each other's eyes, they stroked the blades up and down, up and down. Nel found a thick twig and with her thumbnail, pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence" (Morrison, 1973:58). Chicken Little interrupts their joyful time. This little boy wants to be part of their fun and eventually is drown because of Sula. His death becomes a sacrifice to Sula and Nel's friendship. For this accidental event, Sula and Nel experience growing pains. Since Chicken's funeral, there is an inseparable bond between the two girls. "They held hands and knew that only the coffin would lie in the earth, the bubbly laughter and the press of

fingers in the palm would stay aboveground forever"(Morrison, 1973:66). They share the secret together and keep faith to each other.

Sula breaks the tie between them when she sleeps with Nel's husband, Jude. Sula's defection follows Nel for twenty years before she realizes her love for Sula. Sula uses Chicken Little as a scapegoat for her fear from Eva. Chicken Little becomes a total victim of the chain of abuse and fear surrounding him. For his sake, Sula is no longer afraid of death. According to Sula, provided they could keep a secret about Chicken Little's death, they should be able to accept the infidelity with Jude. Chicken Little's death is a signal of life, death, and morality. To Sula, the absence of punishment for Chicken Little's death makes her believe she can do anything she wants. She ignores the conventional codes of behavior and creates a new world according to her own wills. From the death of Chicken Little, we discover that the female relationship between Nel and Sula is built on shared secret and mutual trust. Meanwhile, his death suggests this adolescent female relationship between Sula and Nel is more significant than any cross-gender relationships.

Jude is the male who affects Sula and Nel's firm bond during their adulthood. Both Nel and Sula dream of falling into love with a perfect man in their adolescence. Nel dreams that a man with "smiling sympathetic eyes" would enter into her life. Similarly, Sula escapes from her disorder house by dreaming in an attic "behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of a someone who shared both the taste and the speed" (Morrison, 1973:52). Both girls want a man who can understand her and support her. But their dreams fail due to the emasculation of Afro-American males.

Morrison proves the necessity of black women's sisterhood from their unsuccessful relationship with black males. Jude seems to be a man that both Sula and Nel need. The harmonious relationship between Sula and Nel breaks when Nel finds her husband and Sula naked in her bed. Undoubtedly, this episode challenges the women's friendship. Three years later, when Nel visits Sula, Sula replies Nel's question: "If we were such good friends, how come you couldn't get over

it?"(Morrison, 1973:145). Here Morrison suggests that women friendship could supplant the marriage and male is an object they can share. Several years after Sula's death, Nel comes to her friend's grave and begins to realize: "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude. We was girls together, O Lord, Sula, Girl, girl, girl girl girl"(Morrison, 1973:174). For Nel, marriage is one of condition of living that defines a woman's place. For Sula, in her sexual action with different men, she just fulfills her own satisfaction. Her casual sexual affairs with the men in the Bottom emasculate them. She has the sexual relationship with a man only once and then she would discard him without any excuse. She wants to welcome herself and make herself in a matchless harmony. Chicken Little and Jude are two playthings for the two women. The former belongs to their girlhood and the latter is in their adulthood. For the emasculation of the black males, the black women fail to find the trust and support from the cross-gender relationship. Sula and Nel need each other, however both of them never really need a man in their life.

Sula's mother Hannah is another example to illustrate the tight bond among black women. Although Hannah violated black community's moral codes, she was not discarded by other women in the Bottom. They cleaned her body after her death even though she had illicit relationships with their husband. "The women who washed the body and dressed it for death wept for her burned hair and wrinkled breasts as through they themselves had been her lovers"(Morrison, 1973:77). This scene suggests that these women unconsciously accept the rebel qualities in Hannah. She links tightly with them. Essentially, she is one part of them and explores some qualities that hide in their mind. She becomes a legend among them.

3.2.2. The Convent in *Paradise*

The female relationship in *Paradise* is another example for the importance of sisterhood in black community. The women of the Convent willingly accept the female individuals who have been identified as "other" by the male-centered Ruby: adulterers, unmarried pregnant women, alcoholics, and women fighting against their husbands or other authority figures in the community. Consolata, the founder of the

Convent, teaches the Convent women to combine the natural world with their spirits and bodies. These women begin to know how to connect to each other by eating a meatless diet, allowing the rain to help clean their traumas.

Morrison describes the Convent as a home where women live in safety without male oppression. At first, it was a traditional Convent. Consolata came here to heal her sufferings. Later it becomes a shelter for many miserable women—Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Pallas. They live together to heal the violent traumas of their lives under the guidance of Consolata.

Every woman in the Convent was once bashed and abused by males. For example, before entering into the Convent, the twenty-year-old Seneca led a miserable life. When she was five years old, her adolescent mother, Jean, abandoned her. She spent four nights and five days knocking every door in her public housing building in order to find Jean. She always kept quiet and never cries in the foster family. After she had been sexually abused by a foster brother, she formed the habit of self-cutting. Her actions of self-abuse suggest that she did not know how to seek she identity and to love herself.

And all these women have experienced the death and other sufferings. Arnette forces an early delivery, resulting in the death of her premature baby. Gigi arrived at the Convent in a hearse and Mavis in the Cadillac in which her infant twins died. Pallas could not speak at first and Seneca was indulged in ritual self-bloodletting, racked with "a pain so wildly triumphant she would do anything to kill it" (Morrison, 1998:261). Pallas, who has returned to her father, makes her way again to the Convent when she can no longer conceal her pregnancy, believing the Convent to be a place where she can hide from the consequences of life. Sweetie Fleetwood, mother of four sick infants, journeys down the road to the Convent in desperate and wild despair.

The Convent shelters Ruby's women, providing food and care and a "haven" for their anger and fears. Consolata heals the pains of Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas by making them lie "unspeaking", "naked in candlelight", and unmoving in a painted,

fixed outline of their bodies on the cold "cellar floor" (Morrison, 1998:263). These women communicate to each other and shared their harsh experiences. In the end, they learn to accept the death of their beloved ones calmly and help each other to prevent themselves from suffering. They believe they stand the top of the world and nothing is fearful including male violence.

In *Paradise*, Morrison shows a woman's trinity with mother, daughter, and spirit. They carry the memory, the magic, and the creative power of the ideal community. Eventually the women in the Convent regain the love and happiness of life through the support between each other and free away from male oppression.

3.3. Motherhood, the Fundamental Relationship in Black Community

Motherhood is at the core of people's life and is associated with love and pain. Toni Morrison draws attention on the most fundamental of personal relationships between mother and children. Most important figures in Morrison's works live in a house of their mothers or other women. The house represents the matriarchal social structure and firm female relationship. In *Sula*, Sula lived with Eva, Hannah and other women in a house with many rooms.

3.3.1. The Typical Morrison Mother

Mothers are the center of Morrison's fiction. Her mode on motherhood has come to be the hallmark of much contemporary Afro-American women's fiction. She eliminates the boundaries of the maternal role and enriches definition of the concept of mothering. They are mothers who struggle against racism and sexism and resist oppression. The emancipation and empowerment are not only for the mothers but also for their children. They teach their children to survive in the hostile world and keep their personality facing the white dominant culture. And they emblematically refigure black people's history.

Eva in *Sula* is a typical Morrison mother. Morrison lessens the importance of maleness by means of placing these male figures under the control of Eva.

Traditionally, a mother role is usually associated with nurturing and nursing. But Morrison discovers the combination of the maternal and God qualities in Eva. According to the traditional culture, mother is a symbol of creation and birthing, while God represents strong power of violence and destruction. That is to say, Eva has the omnipotent power to determine the fate of his son and others. She can be in charge of her own world through her sovereign power of mother and grandmother even without leaving her bedroom.

Besides, mothers in Morrison's fiction are always given primary names. These ancient names are viewed as transmitters of culture. They represent a nation's history, culture and community's consciousness. Morrison tries to represent the Afro-American archetypes through various figures of great mothers. Obviously, from Eva we could find a mass of evidence to connect Eva to Bible. Like the biblical Eve, she is regarded as the mother of the life. She reshapes Afro-American matrilineal autonomy and bonding. She has the power to name and classify the various kinds of people who lived in her home. Eva willingly makes choices being a builder and ruler of her own home. She established and developed her domination at 7 Carpenter's Road. The address suggests that this is the road where Christ will be found. Seven is associated with God created the world in seven days. The number and name here suggest the divine power of a goddess. She is an ideal image of self-reliance and a creator or sovereign in her home. She becomes simultaneously the mother of death and life.

Eva is also a character who breaks up conventions and creates a space for her own identity. We can see Eva's interest in boundaries and spaces through her constant rebuilding of her house. It reveals her strong willing of controlling over ingress and egress. In fact, many female characters in *Sula* are interested in redistributions of space to present their power. "Sula Peace lived in a house of many rooms that had been built over a period of five years to specifications of its owner, who kept on adding things: more stairways—there were three sets to the second floor—more rooms, doors and stoops"(Morrison, 1973:30).

3.3.2. Motherhood and Male Emasculation

It is not that Eva does not want to be a traditional domestic woman, but reality forces her to deny such kind of identity. Morrison believes that the racial discrimination Afro-American males suffer very often transforms, in turn, into gender oppression on African women. It is neither racism nor sexism but economics is the primary obstacles for Afro-American women.

Eva has to support the family because of the absence of her husband. She loves her children and strives for earning money to foster them. After her husband's abandonment, she attempts to do housework, be other's maids, weed or sow on farms, and do any jobs which can make her gain bread and butter for her children. Hannah doubts whether Eva really loves her because she could not feel her mother's maternal emotions. She answers that "big old eyes in your head would have been two holes full of maggots if I hadn't (love you)" (Morrison, 1973:67). In response of Hannah's question of why she did not play with them, she said nobody plays in 1895 because "1895 was a killer, girl. Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies" (Morrison, 1973:68).

The way Eva is treated by her husband forces her to become aggressive and strong. When Eva's husband—BoyBoy returns to the Bottom several years later, she begins her first test of destroying the human bond. His cool big-city style and arrogance in bringing his lover with him irritate her. "Knowing that she would hate him long and well filled her with pleasant anticipation, like when you know you are going to fall in love with someone and you wait for the happy signs"(Morrison, 1973:36). When he struts into her house, the picture of shine, but makes no reference to his children, Eva discovers that underneath his aura of leisure and new money there is "defeat in the stalk of his neck and the curious tight way he held his shoulders" (Morrison, 1973:36). She removes her pain into a pleasurably intense hatred of BoyBoy.

Hating BoyBoy, she could get on with it, and have the safety, the thrill, the consistency of that hatred as long as she wanted or needed it to define and strengthen

her or protect her from routine vulnerabilities. The deliberate hatred keeps her alive and happy. She transforms hatred into a positive emotion and attitude of live. She was inspired to be a goddess through the hatred of BoyBoy. "The provocative dynamic at work is that Eva uses the men while they believe they are bestowing their masculine attention upon her"(Harris, 1991: 74).

She stands at the top of the family rank. Eva supervises the activities in her home, seldom descending to the lower level. She nourishes and protects her children through her own capability. The abandonment of her husband becomes the life motivation for Eva. After her husband discarded the family, she must support her family through assertiveness and self-reliance. She shows her power through establishing her own territory. "Her separation from people in the community and acting against their norms enable her to develop an ironic posture in relation to them; she can live with them because she is now superior to them"(Harris, 1991:73). She lost a leg in exchange for the freedoms, which are equal to the men. The freedom gives her ability to love, hate, rule even murder.

3.3.3. Motherhood and Son

For Morrison, because of their emasculation, the black male must learn to gain protection and their nation's cultural heritages from the mother in order to survive in the black community. Eva's son, Plum appears to lack hegemonic masculinity. Like Shadrack, Plum attempts to escape from his self. Instead of establishing a new orderly life, he is indulged in drugs. Morrison pictures Plum as an object of contempt and dirty infant. His infantile behavior suggests his lack of independence. A baby is so totally dependent on the presence of the mother that mother is dominating in the eyes of an infant. He wants to seek for a shelter to protect him from suffering and fragmental life. Therefore, as Eva said, he hopes to go return to the womb, "he wanted to crawl back in my womb and well...There wasn't space for him in my womb. And he was crawling back. Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time"(Morrison, 1973:71).

He wants to return to the parental shelter in order to avoid facing the responsibility of self. Plum's strong sense of dependence and inevitable decay disappoints Eva. Consequently she murders her son. There is no direct description of Eva's burning of her son, instead of that; the scene is presented through Plum's eyes.

> Plum on the rim of warm light sleep...He felt twilight. Now there seemed to be some kind of wet light traveling over his legs and stomach with a deep attractive smell. It wound itself—this wet light —all about him, splashing and running into his skin. He opened his eyes and saw what he imagined was the great wing of eagle pouring a wet lightness over him...Everything is going to be all right, it said. Knowing that it was so he closed his eyes and sank into the bright hole of sleep. (Morrison, 1973:47)

The great wing of eagle embodies the mother's protection for him. So eventually when he is dying, he feels safety and peace under his mother's shelter.

Actually, Eva kills Plum to prevent him from being defined as inferior. When Eva walks into Plum's room on her crutches, she is described as a motherly image of a fierce giant heron who " was swinging and swooping, like a giant heron, so graceful sailing about in its own habitat but awkward and comical when it folded its wings and tried to walked" (Morrison, 1973:46). She could not bear her son's impotence, "I just thought of way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man"(Morrison, 1973:72). Therefore, she kills Plum and to some extent she gives a rebirth to her defiled son. Morrison presents Plum's burning as an act of purgation. The narrator uses many images as symbols of rebirth and purification in the scene of Plum's dying. Plum is the son protected but also destroyed by the love of the powerful black matriarch.

Eva kills Plum also because his impotence has undermined her proud as a mother and all her maternal efforts are in vain. In Eva's eyes, she creates Plum's life at the price of her loss of her leg and her husband. Therefore, she could not bear Plum's degeneration. Eva becomes the vengeful goddess in destroying a creature who is unable to worship her in an appropriate manner. To some extent, Plum's death is a

blood sacrifice for Eva. She reward people who can serve her well and punish those who do not. Plum is descried as a reminder of ineffectuality of BoyBoy. Eva regards Plum as a mirror of his father and eventually determined to end his seemingly useless life. Morrison presents an image of goddess and mother who owns the sole authority in the Bottom. Morrison illustrates a woman-centered consciousness that runs through most of the whole novel through Eva's power over other Afro-Americans in the Bottom especially including her son and her husband.

Deweys is another example for Eva's unbelievable mother power. Eva has adopted three totally different boys: one is a deeply black boy, one is light-skinned with red hair, and the other is half-Mexican with chocolate skin. All of The three boys are thoroughly subordinate to Eva. She gives them a place in her home, names them and determines their fate. She forces them to worship at her feet and uses them to build up her authority in Bottom. Eva disregards their identity, "What you need to tell them apart for? They's all Deweys"(Morrison, 1973:38). After Eva calls them Deweys, three quite different boys become hardly distinguishable. For example, when they are sent into school, the teacher finds that "like everyone else before her, she gradually found that she could not tell one from the other" (Morrison, 1973:39). Furthermore, they are undifferentiated in mind, "they spoke with one voice, thought with one mind, and maintained annoying privacy" (Morrison, 1973:39). From the life experiences of Deweys, Morrison represents Eva's omnipotent magical power.

Apart from Eva, Morrison also shapes other types of motherhood. Helence Wright in *Sula* is viewed as a mother who manipulates her daughter and becomes a repressive force in daughter's life. Helence can control Nel's imagination and make Nel become obedient for her. She can keep her power and accept other's respect for her. When she carries Nel to visit her ill grandmother, a white conductor humiliated them. She counterpunches the conductor with a smile. She tries to keep her pride as a mother role in front of Nel. Morrison depicts Helence as a pillar of middle class in the isolated black world of Bottom community. Like Sula, Nel also comes from a line of women fending for themselves without the help of black males.

Furthermore, Morrison shows the female capacity of nurturing and protecting in *Paradise* through the five eggs that Anna discovers in the convent henhouse as a metaphor for the survival of the five women. In *Paradise*, some of the Convent women arouse the readers' sympathy are not for their madness and hurt but for their motherless. There is no adequate mother to teach them feminine qualities and to help them love themselves and bodies. In order to escape from the black male oppression and gain mother's protecting, the group of women enters into the Convent for seeking for the shelter. Morrison suggests that the Convent of women embodies the mother's warm and power. Mothers have the power to heal the wounds inflicted by institutional and all other forms of male oppression.

Chapter Four Conclusion

As a black female writer, Morrison depicts various female images who have complex characters and challenge the stereotypical images of women. Meanwhile, She also tries to reconstruct male behavior or masculinity with a broader view of gender dynamics.

This paper makes attempt to illustrate the gender dynamics Toni Morrison represents in *Sula* and *Paradise*. One distinct feature of gender dynamics in these two novels is the unusual silence of the black males. Unlike heroes of the white culture who are usually strong-minded and protective, male characters in these two novels are very often untrustworthy, superficial, immature, and anonymous, driven with complex, fragmented and unspeakable thought. They have no control over the occurrences because of racial discrimination. Neither do they have any authority over the narrative of those events. Some even take on characteristics of feminine. Shadrack in *Sula* is a typical emasculated male figure, whose disorientation mirrors the situation of Afro-Americans in twentieth-century. His sense of the self is shattered by white discrimination and his war experience. However, overwhelmed by his sufferings, Shadrack is unable to recollect himself and find a new identity. Instead, he just lives in illusions. To escape from this fate, some choose to seek feminine protection, such as Ajax and Jude in *Sula*. The former is attracted by the feminine power represented by Sula and his mother because their protections enable him to enjoy a sense of security, while the latter tries to find a woman who can replace his mother and his own absent identity. Others transform their oppression into the violence on the black women. In *Paradise*, the hostility and massacre toward the Convent by the men of Ruby, clearly reveals this point. The women at the Convent become scapegoats because their acceptance of different new ideas and economic autonomy challenge the necessity of Ruby's rigid system of community. So they

choose to destroy them. This is definitely a sign of weakness rather than potency.

Secondly, Morrison discovers the strong female autonomy in the black community. Many of her female characters appear to acquire features of masculinity because of the absence of masculinity on the part of black males. While black women is usually described by white writers as submissive, nurturing, and domestic, Morrison presents Sula as a masculine character who does the kinds of things normally only men do. Through a series of adventures and her association with Nel, Sula manages to maintain a strong sense of the self, thought with flaws and seams.

Besides, Morrison demonstrates that sisterhood turns out to be more important than cross–gender relationship for Afro-American women and the black community in general. The author uses the female relationship among the women in the Convent and sisterhood between Sula and Nel to illustrate this point. Although Sula and Nel have different class backgrounds and personality, they become good friends because of common fate and complementary personalities. They are described by Morrison as perfect complements. Morrison proves the necessity of black women's sisterhood from their unsuccessful relationship with black males. In *Paradise*, the women of the Convent learn to love themselves and help each other to relieve them from suffering and abuse by men.

Furthermore, Morrison tries to illustrate that motherhood plays a fundamental role in the Afro–American life instead of "Father Law". Eva in *Sula* is a typical image of mother in the Morrison's works who takes on omnipotent power to lead the family and the black community. The way Eva is treated by her husband forces her to become aggressive and strong. As a result, she stands at the top of the family rank. Apart from Eva's husband, she also forces her sons including Deweys to worship at her feet and uses them to build up her authority in the Bottom.

From the analysis of the gender dynamics in Morrison's *Sula* and *Paradise*, the author of this paper argues that, at least for Morrison, the female–centered relationship becomes the mainstream in the Afro-American life instead of cross–gender relationship due to the emasculation of Afro-American males.

To sum up, the preceding discussion has been suggested that Morrison tries to reconstruct the traditional gender relationship in the white masculine literature. She reshapes a female-dominant society and lessens the importance of maleness in black community. Although there are many studies involving themes of *Sula* and *Paradise*, most of them fix attentions on analysis of black culture, black roots and black identity. Furthermore, when it comes to the subject on gender, the focus is mainly on one single side of gender relationship, such as powerful new black women or debased black males. The author in this paper clearly presents the gender dynamics in *Sula* and *Paradise*, which ignored in other critiques. Such discoveries will certainly contribute to the specific studies of the two novels and all of Morrison's works in general. Apart from *Sula* and *Paradise*, Morrison also displays her perspectives of gender dynamics in other novels. This will be further studied by the author of this paper.

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