

## CHAPTER -V

### **Morrison in 1990s: An Ecocritical Study of *Jazz***

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Toni Morrison's *Jazz* is a historical novel which got published in the year 1992. The novel with its publication invited varied responses from critics. The novel was an important part of Morrison's dream of a Dantesque trilogy based on African-American history. This dream trilogy began with *Beloved* which came out in the year 1987 and ended with *Paradise* which got published in the year 1997. The story of the novel revolves around the romantic triangle of Joe, Violet and Dorcas which operated in the background of Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

Narrated by a multi-voiced narrator, *Jazz* is a story which is told in non-chronological order and lays bare the quintessential spirit of the Jazz Age. The story of *Jazz* is a moving tale of romance which relates the life of three people, viz. Violet, Joe and Dorcas. They got entangled in their present love because of their fixation to past and displacement to the city. Although Violet and Joe Trace were in a marital bond, they were not enjoying any happiness which was linked with nuptial bliss. As both of them put up in an apartment in Harlem, their lives were invaded by a seventeen year old girl named Dorcas. Joe met Dorcas at her aunt's place where he had gone to sell cosmetics. Joe was infatuated towards her and before leaving their place he whispered something in the ear of Dorcas which kick started their romantic journey. When Violet came to know that her marriage was facing threats because her husband was having an affair with Dorcas, she went crazy. The twist in the tale came when Dorcas realized that Joe was not perfect for her and opted for a younger and handsome lover Acton and left Joe who was madly in love with her. He could neither

digest nor fathom this change in Dorcas and in his fury of madness shot Dorcas at a party. When people around Dorcas tried to investigate who attacked Dorcas, she remained silent and didn't reveal his name because her love for Joe was still intact in her heart. But Violet's anger couldn't subside there as she went to the funeral of Dorcas and attacked her body with a knife in order to vent out her anger. Though she was thrown out of the funeral and became a butt of ridicule in society because of her weird reaction, the anger in her heart was still boiling because of Joe and Dorcas' association.

In order to hurt her husband who was always seen crying after the demise of Dorcas, Violet initiated an affair with a young man. But, that didn't work out as Joe paid no heed to it. Violet then resorted to other methods. She went on a hunt to know everything about Dorcas so that she could find out what was there in Dorcas which was otherwise missing in Violet, which drifted Joe trace away from Violet and he got attracted to Dorcas. But as the narration shows the hunt of Dorcas' life by Violet, the readers get a dig into the past lives of all three major characters as well as other minor characters. The past lives got linked with the present and one comes to know the real reasons for all the actions of various characters which change the attitude of readers towards them who are initially repelled by their actions.

The end of the story however comes up as quite unexpected both for the narrator and reader. When Dorcas' friend, Felice entered Joe Trace's apartment, she seemed to be another Dorcas who would further complicate their lives and destroy them. But, as her name suggests, Felice brought happiness with herself and all three of them shared their experiences and views with each other which gave a break to their painful journey. After Felice's visit, Joe became happy and started enjoying his life with Violet. He even looked for a job. Violet too came out of her cave of

frustration and anger and started considering Felice as her own daughter whom she could never hate. The story thus has a happy ending which has been initially perceived as a tragic love triangle. The novel is simple and mysterious at the same time. On the surface level, the novel relates a simple story of love and hatred among three people. But by linking the story with their past lives and juxtaposing the dreamland of city with countryside and interlinking the whole tale with the history of slavery, Morrison has opened doors for various critics to analyze the novel from multiple angles.

Different critics have figured out different inclinations in the novel which have been dissected exhaustively by these critics. In his paper, Caroline Brown explores the role of music and past in *Jazz*. According to him, the role of past is very significant in the novel. The past which is signified by Wild and Golden Gray and is being traced by Joe, Violet and Dorcas finally comes to surface and leads to the acknowledgement of self for all the characters. Love for Brown emerges as a force of victory as it has got the capacity to cross the limits of self and enter into a space which is full of echoes of freedom. He also focuses on how the technique of non-hermeneutic is applied in order to unleash the various narrative strands of the novel.

Elizabeth M. Cannon explores the novel from a feminist angle in her article which highlights how Morrison has offered readers an understanding of black female desire in her novel. She shows how a woman can be 'Violet' and 'Violent' at the same time. Cannon further shows how Morrison has indirectly expressed the need to share this female desire among other black women so that the hurts can be healed and desires can be achieved. The same idea is articulated in K. Sumana's essay which focuses on the importance of women bonding because women face the triple oppression of race, gender and class. Women have to come together and have to share

their fears and happiness because this is the only solution left to them if they want to come out of this chaos. Vanita Singh in her book studies the novel from a psychological angle. In this work, she penetrates deep into the psyche of women characters that have carried the burden of slavery even after achieving freedom.

Andrea O' Reilly explores the concept of motherhood which is evident in *Jazz's* narrative framework. Her article unravels the importance of maternal bonding for all the characters in the novel. She further explicates the psychological effects and alienation which is faced by orphaned children. Role of music in the novel has also been elaborated by many critics. Richard Hardack in his article shows how black Americans even after achieving freedom carries with them the twin consciousness of being an African and an American with them. The music of jazz is also similar to it because of its origin in Africa and blooming in America. The spirit of *Jazz*, thus echoes the spirit of Afro-Americans in general. Equally significant is the study by Shail Bala. In one of her chapters, she describes how the title of the novel indicates and illustrates the behavioural patterns of the black people in America. Thus, the novel has been interpreted and analysed from various angles, viz. feminist, racist, and psychological. Like other novels of Toni Morrison, *Jazz* too makes an interesting study from ecocritical point of view. In her novels before *Jazz*, Morrison has dwelled upon the aspects of nature to show how slavery has fragmented and distorted humans' relationship with nature. However, in *Jazz* the novelist has shown a completely different aspect towards this fractured relationship between nature and culture. She accepts that the wave of urbanism has created separate spheres for city and wilderness.

Owing to their fractured identity which got created in the lap of nature due to the horrors of slavery, Afro-Americans had started considering city not as something

to be dreaded. Rather it became a promised land for the slaves. The questions which arose were very challenging – Would blacks be ever able to forge their earlier bonding with nature which they have lost? Could nature be still used to heal the lives of blacks? Could city and nature inhabit together in the lives of blacks? Did blacks still yearn to go back to the wilderness they escaped from? Was city completely incapable of healing the lives of blacks? These and many more such questions remain unanswered so far in the works of Toni Morrison.

*Jazz* offers a very significant area for ecocritical study in terms of ‘sense of place’. Many critics have paid attention to this aspect. In his essay Catrin Gersdorf has shown how nature and urban grid are considered as diametrically opposite places. They can’t co-exist together. Thus, the gulf between the two will increase because where one dwells, the existence of the other can’t be dreamt of. The solution, however, is possible only when these two co-exist. *Jazz*, for Gersdorf, is an important text as it shows the importance of this simultaneous existence of city and nature in the lives of Afro-Americans. “Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* and the City” is another article which puts forth the ecocritical findings of *Jazz* by Anne-Marie Paquet Deyris. The paper shows the novel as a discourse of displacement which talks about the ‘traces’ and ‘tracks’ of black people which they have to establish between city and nature which can eventually help them to form a true self-identity. City’s identification as a paradise and disillusionment associated with it are also dealt with in this paper.

The article “Experiencing *Jazz*” by Eusebio L. Rodrigues is again a very illuminating study of the novel. Though the novel does not directly talk about the eco-critical concerns, it certainly locates how the environment around people plays a crucial role on the psyche of the people in the novel. The study shows how the narrative shifts between city and country and how characters’ lives get affected by

this free flowing association of emotions, ideas and events from both sides. Despite these afore stated articles and essays, there is still a big dearth of ecocritical study in the huge corpus of critical acumen which has come for *Jazz* from the critics all over the world.

The present study thus is an attempt to answer all afore stated ecocritical questions which still remain unanswered when one reads the novel from an ecocritical angle. Not only this, attempts will also be made in this study to show how Toni Morrison has grown up as a novelist in her ecocritical concerns. The environmental problems and challenges during the 70s when she penned *The Bluest Eye* were completely different from the environmental crisis of 90s when she came up with this novel. This shift in the issues and how that shift has been shown in the novel became a significant factor in the study of the novel through the green lens. Moreover, the novel was the middle part of a trilogy. Morrison's skills need to be explored in relation to the exposition of environment concerns in three consecutive novels and more prominently in *Jazz* as it acts as a linking agent between two other books of trilogy.

The relationship between nature and culture is a complex one which is covered with many layers. In the America of post-slavery period, nature and culture were often considered as mutually exclusive places. The existence of culture came only after the destruction of nature. They couldn't cohabit together as culture and nature eventually formed irreconcilable spaces. Carin Gersdorf, in his work, "Nature in the Grid : American Culture Urbanism and Ecocriticism" puts forward a view of a space of colonial Savannah and illustrates how, "view of Savannah...see nature and the urban grid as diametrically opposed phenomena"(1). What is true of Savannah is true of the modern environmental status as well. The distinction between wilderness and

civilization is clearly visible in this modern epoch. City has surfaced as something which sabotages nature.

The movement of new urbanism was a transition from the earlier concept of urbanity. The earlier concept of urbanity talked about the separation of city and countryside while the new movement of urbanity talked about the interaction between these twin concepts of nature and culture rather than their separation. Slowly and steadily, this new concept of urbanism started affecting other spheres as well. Literary discourses too changed their approach towards the depiction of city. The city got a reconstruction from environmental perspective. This new concept of urbanity and city became an important facet of ecocriticism which somehow evolved during the same time when the new concept of city was taking its shape. *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*, a book by Michael Bennet and David W. Teague was an important book which acted as a pioneer in changing the attitude of people towards this new concept of urbanity. In order to protect environment, the general tendency in America was to promote nature writing because such kinds of writing would change the attitude of people towards nature. But such kind of writing didn't help in instilling a feeling of love towards Nature. Rather these writings portrayed the city as a devil. As Andrew Rose points out, "the literature of conservation – almost wholly devoted to nature worship...is persistent in its demonization of the city" (43). The city became a devil's workshop which annihilated and gulped down everything that existed in nature for its own survival. The myth was broken and a need was felt to redefine the association between nature and culture. This need for a revived relationship between the two also penetrated into various literary discourses and philosophical thoughts.

*Jazz* emerged as an important text which provided a new outlook towards the spatial relationship between nature and culture. According to many critics, the role of the grid system which forms the basis for a city was a positive one. It was formed to offer protection against the harmful effects of nature and to improve the health conditions of the people living in that space. Scattered arrangement in a forest made it difficult to manage but grid system played a pivotal role in their management. The prejudices towards city as a space were still intact with the masses. The concept of city was rejected by many for several years on the basis of its demonizing effects upon nature.

However, as the societies progressed, the writers challenged these anti-urban sentiments harbored by the earlier writers and environmentalists. What was even more interesting is that white Americans were full of anti-urban sentiments and explored the horrible pictures of city. On the other hand, Afro-Americans who worked as slaves in the plantations and endured innumerable tortures in the lap of nature considered city as a promised land which gave them more money and freedom from horrors of plantation slavery which happened in wilderness. On the one hand, white writers celebrated wilderness and tried to curb down the malefic presence of city and called for the retreat to the pastoral life, on the other hand emerged black writers like Morrison and Paul Auster who felt that in order to regain their self-identity and resurrect themselves out of their past lives, characters had to love the city and over-emphasis and domination of their past lives which linked them to nature was only going to obstruct them.

Postmodern novelists thus changed their attitude towards the city. Though these novelists still believed in the harmful effects of city on individual, they didn't consider resort to nature as a solution to this crippling problem. Writers like William



dean Howells and Frank Norris gave a new dimension to the fight between nature and city. This distinction of nature versus city was replaced by a new distinction of urban exteriority versus interiority and between protected and unprotected spaces of city. Moreover, this new concept of city was not devoid of nature. Nature and city intersected in this new attitude of writers and environmentalists towards city. This interaction between the spaces of nature and city on the same platform acted as a catalyst and had an enzymatic effect on literary discourse which started depicting this altered relationship between nature and city. Morrison's *Jazz* was also one of these novels which projected this newly constructed relationship between city and nature. The novel *Jazz* focused on New York City of 1990s. New York City was the chief attraction for all the Afro-American slaves who worked in horrible conditions down South. For these slaves, North, especially, New York City was a space of freedom and solution to all the tortures and exploitation of slavery. These slaves in search of happiness migrated to the dreamland of North during the era of the Great Migration. Cecil S. Giscombe points out about *Jazz*, that the novel was an improvisation on the theme of "the melodious southern wild coming into the city" (63).

As the narrative unfolds, one meets the characters Joe Trace and Violet Trace. They had become the part of the Great Migration of 1920s when they came to New York from their original home in Virginia. Joe and Violet joined thousands of black slaves who shifted to urban places between 1830 and 1930. Joe and Violet Trace moved to the city with lots of expectations. City life for them was a dream world which would put an end to all their miseries. The migration was not just an attempt to come out of the curse of slavery but to improve their economic conditions as well so that they could improve their lives. The city for them was a wonderland. Even before

they stepped into this wonderland, their minds were full of imaginations and dreams relating to the promised land of city.

For the characters of *Jazz*, the city was not a place of hatred or alienation. For these Afro-Americans who came from South, the city brought a lot of positivity and warmth along with it. The past of these blacks was full of torments and exploitation down South. The city offered them a huge sigh of relief from that miserable life. And that's why city for them could not evoke the feelings of alienation, "Part of why they loved it was the specter they left behind" (33). But, this doesn't signify that North was like heaven completely bereft of problems. The violent attacks faced by these southern blacks trampled down their exuberant spirits but these negativities could not deter them from loving this city because the city had offered them plethora of opportunities which were completely unavailable in South. The city became a site where the desires of the dispossessed found an echo. At the same time, it became a site of violence which continuously threatened them. Past and present both seemed to be unsafe territories for the characters in *Jazz*. As the narrator documents this oscillating state of blacks slaves in America, the blacks couldn't fully accept both the North and the South as different kinds of violence were attached to these places.

In fact, after the abolition of slavery, Afro-Americans faced a different kind of oppression. Though they were not forced to work in the plantations, they had to work somewhere for their survival. The system of share cropping and shacks replaced slavery. But in this system, Afro-Americans were not paid for work. Share croppers were mostly illiterate people who were befooled by their masters and eventually share croppers felt themselves cheated as owners used to reap benefits. Despite strenuous hard work all through the day, share croppers were left with no pay at the end of the year. Shacks where these slaves were made to stay didn't offer any respite as it didn't

give enough protection from heat and cold. So, when these Afro-Americans got the opportunities of job in the North, they were happy as they would be paid. So, they rushed to that land where they hoped to improve their life which is completely drenched in misery. Lynching of blacks was another problem faced by blacks in the South. The whites of the south were unhappy because they had to lose their slaves which would snatch their owner status from them. Ku Klush Khan used terrorist attacks to threaten blacks. Lynching and hangings served as a reminder to all the blacks that they were not truly free. South became a place of suffering and Northern spirit came as a bag full of promises. Harlem became the black capital of the world as here in this city these blacks believed that they could regain their dignity and liberty. The hope of the new Negro which found expression in the hopes of a new city surfaces in these lines, "I'm strong...and indestructible" (7).

And once these blacks came to the unknown land, they fell in love with this city which was full of hopes and aspirations. Despite a small house and meager salary offered by unattractive jobs, the city was a place they cherished to stay in. And soon this temporary love got converted into permanent love. But, this feeling of love and awe brought disillusionment for blacks. As the characters of *Jazz* grew up with the ever-growing city, they were only left with the superficial attraction and love that the city held for them. And in this process they had stopped loving themselves and each other. And, this lack of love drifted them away from their own identities. This transition which the city brought in the lives of Afro-Americans was detrimental to their survival. Northern City spread its own kind of violence for black characters in the novel. The city emerged as a place full of complexities whose love was understood only in the hunting part.

Moreover, the city had left men in such a position that they couldn't forfeit this situation now. Resultantly, the blacks started tracing their past to locate their roots so that by associating them with those memories, they could create a habitable environment to live in the city. The point to be noted is that blacks intersected nature and culture in their lives. According to the concept of new urbanism, the city and country should not be treated as mutually exclusive spaces. Rather, these two spaces should overlap with each other. The absence of any one of them was bound to create a void in the lives of Afro-Americans. This void got created in the lives of Joe and Violet Trace. The city was full of possibilities yet it laid a trap for the Afro-Americans. The city became the centre and everyone revolved around it. The love of the city became so dominant that it snatched away the real feeling of love amongst them.

The city life followed a monotonous pattern. The inner emptiness of the city expanded with time and left deep imprints on the city territory. In the novel, the city left a huge impact on the psyche of all characters. Joe's extra-marital affair with Dorcas and subsequent murder of Dorcas, Violet's fascination for birds and her attack on the corpse of Dorcas at funeral are some of the incidents which pinpoint the effects of the city on the mental landscape of people. The study of the characters of Joe, Violet and Dorcas thus becomes important from an ecocritical point of view in relation to the sense of place created by the city and their past lives in the wilderness of the South. Joe and Violet both belonged to the third generation of slaves. They had heard about the entire history of horrors of slavery from their ancestors. Even their own generation had been sufferers and witness to the tortures and lynching of black slaves. Further they were crippled by the state of penury to which they were subjected to by the white owners. This led all of them to the journey towards the city. Despite

the discrimination faced by them during journey where white passengers were dealt respectfully and no heed was paid to the black passengers, the southern slaves were happy during this journey to their dreamland.

Joe's character is important as he is the common element of the love triangle which frames the story of the novel. Joe was an orphan child who had been deserted by her mother Wild who refused to take the responsibility of motherhood after Joe's birth. Wild had no ability to speak and she lived the life like an animal in the cane fields. Joe was always obsessed with this idea and felt hurt because his mother never gave him the acknowledgement of being her son and he was also not in the capacity to take care of him. Joe had also attached the suffix 'Trace' with his name because he could not find any trace of his mother. The thing which troubled Joe the most in relation to his mother came along with him to the city as well. Joe wanted recognition from his mother so that he could establish his true identity. Joe's character here represents all the black characters that had come out of the wilderness of the country side to the civilization of the city. Joe becomes representative of the blacks who jostled between the two mutually exclusive areas of nature and culture. For Joe, nature of Vesper country was his home. His roots were attached to that land of wilderness. His mother Wild gave him birth on that land. It was the land where he learnt the art of hunting and grew up to be a full- fledged man.

The character of Wild, i.e. Joe's mother, is here representative of Mother Nature to which blacks were deeply attached to. Thus, Joe is symbolic of black African spirit. Just as Joe was attracted towards her mother and longed for her love, in the same way blacks yearned for the love of wilderness which had become even more distorted and fragmented during the post- slavery period. Mother Nature had been exploited so much by the whites that her relationship with her children had become

distorted. She was broken to such an extent that she had lost her feeling of motherhood. Mother Nature was so much affected and hurt by the horrors of white tortures that even though the bearing ability remained, the feeling of love was completely lost in her. She didn't lay claim over her children as she found her completely incapable to flourish them. She had lost even her voice because of the innumerable tortures which had muted her to silence. Joe's mother, i.e. Wild too faced the same situation as Mother Nature. Blacks had been brutally exploited by whites both physically and mentally. The sexual invasion on her body led to the birth of a child but she was not ready to lay a claim on him.

Mother Nature, thus literally turned wild because of the condition she had been placed into. But, this behavior of Wild where she failed to recognize her own child created a loss of identity for Joe. He wanted to trace his roots. He wanted recognition from his mother. This left a huge void and sense of loneliness in the life of Joe even when he moved ahead in his life from countryside to the city. Though initially he was not completely sure that Wild was his mother, he felt a strange connection with her which provided a solace to his heart.

Hunters Hunter dropped many hints in front of Joe so that he could recognize his mother. While teaching him the principles of hunting, he told him never to hurt a female and should not consider Wild as his prey. Not only this, when he was telling Joe that crazy people had their own reason to do any task, he looked into the eyes of Joe and purposely told him that Wild is, "somebody's mother" (175). It was more or less clear from Hunters Hunter's face that this somebody was none other than Joe Trace. After this revelation of Hunters Hunter, Joe became obsessed with the idea of his mother. Joe and Victory saw her traces several times in the forest. But Joe knew that tree was not her favourite place. He heard her music across the river and tried to

trace her down. The description of Joe's search of Wild across the river established the symbolic significance of Wild to the Mother Nature.

The second hunt for his mother came when he was ready to go to Palestine and there emerged a fire in the forest. Joe was very worried about his mother. So, he cancelled his journey and rushed back to Vienna in order to assure whether she was safe or not. But, he could not find any trace of his mother. He even wondered that she might not have escaped. At that very moment, four red wings emerged from a white-oak tree which were symbolic of her presence there. This really hurt Joe and he underwent an emotional breakdown and pleaded to his mother to come out and comfort her with her motherhood.

Here, Joe's dispossession by his mother is symbolic of all the blacks who were dispossessed of their Mother Nature's love due to the distortion in relations caused by the slavery. In his frustration, he aimed a shot at the white oak tree. Though the shot was harmful, it described the inner psychological upheavals which were occurring in Joe. He involved himself maniacally in several works on his journey to Palestine. People, however, considered this mania as a hunger for money, it was actually an inside hunger of love from his mother which he was diverting in other direction. The kinds of work he did during this time were actually related to nature which once against establishes the link between Joe's mother Wild and Mother Nature.

It was in this agony and desire for love that he met Violet Trace whom he later married. Violet was actually a filler for the void which was created by Joe's mother Wild in him. Joe met Violet in Vesper country of Virginia where Violet Trace was resting under a walnut tree and Joe had hid himself at night in the same tree. But in the morning as he awoke, he fell into the lap of Violet and both got attracted towards

each other. Violet for Joe was the invisible wild woman who would possess him and satiate his yearning for love. Wild got replaced by young Violet. In fact, if one closely observes these lines, Joe's situation echoes the condition of all the blacks who when dispossessed of their love for wilderness adjusted themselves with milder view of nature which was signified by the pretty blooming flowers of Violet.

After their marriage, Joe and Violet worked really hard on their crops. But the soil was barren and the whole hard work got wasted. Even for food they had to depend on hunting. Both of them along with their soil and crop were sold to a new owner. The new master was even more exploitative as the debt under him rose to a whooping amount of eight hundred dollars. Then, after sometime Joe took up a job of laying rail. Then again he bought a piece of land but was ditched by the leaders. Ultimately, Joe and Violet were left with no option but to move towards the North as the city there offered brighter prospects than South. North at that time was a dreamland for Southern blacks. But, this was not a willing decision as Joe was more comfortable in the forest. Town for him was an alien space. Since his birth he had stayed in communion with Nature because he was taken care of by Hunters Hunter who taught him all the tricks to survive and live comfortably in wilderness. Even his friends and villagers were also surprised by his decision as they believed that the city was not Joe's cup of tea. Joe himself accepted that he was more comfortable in forests rather than the cemented paths of the city.

Though the countryside men warned him that he would face loneliness in the city, Joe was self-assured that the best woodsman could never have that feeling who had survived in the wilderness. Joe and Violet Trace finally reached the city where they did all sorts of works to ensure their survival. All kind of meager works offered to them were done by both of them with a lot of hard work. They even rented a place



in the city. But, Joe and Violet's love for nature was still intact. They tried hard to adapt to this place and simultaneously kept the spirit of countryside alive by planting trees around them and keeping a lot of birds as well. But it didn't take long for Joe and Violet to realize that the city is not a dreamland as they conjectured. The unpredictable nature of the city which came forward with its violence and alienation finally disrupted the family life of both Joe and Violet.

Disillusionment towards the city is clearly visible in these lines but despite this choking atmosphere, its inhabitants, especially blacks, rose with the expectation of a new sunrise in their lives. Joe and others like him got so much involved in the monotonous rut of the city life that they forgot to pay heed to Mother Nature. Nature was completely forgotten by Joe. In fact, trapped in the busy life of the city with which he even felt disillusioned, Joe could not decide whether the city was good or bad for him. Unable to fathom his situation, he expressed his dilemma through these words which are spoken by the narrator, "There is no air in the city, but there is breath" (10).

Here again, one observes how love for city was antagonistic to the love of nature. The love for two could not move simultaneously. Nature and culture of the city were considered poles apart and the narrator left no meeting ground for both to intersect. And it was this mutually exclusivity of these two regions which drifted Joe back to the Wild. Being a woodsman, a lover of nature, it was very hard for Joe to assimilate himself into the culture of the city. Though he tried very hard, his attraction and hunger for nature couldn't get fulfilled. Had these two forces of nature and culture thrived together, Joe wouldn't have felt this alienation. And this is the point which Morrison wants to bring home to the readers through the character of Joe. And that's why the void created by Mother which was temporary filled by Violet surfaced

again and created emptiness in the life of Joe. Therefore, he went on a hunt for his mother Wild even for the third time.

However, the character of Joe was not the only one which got affected by association to the city. Violet Trace's twenty years long stay in the city had a deepening impact on her mental framework. As the novel opens, we met a girl Violet living in the city who had assumed a double consciousness in her character. She was herself aware of that other Violet in her character and this double existence of Violet which the city gifted to her converted her from 'violet' to 'violent', as she was being named by people around her. In fact, the hard and monotonous life of city had turned violet into a tough, lonely and eccentric woman. Violet's childhood had played a pivotal role in this conversion. When Violet accompanied Joe towards the North, she initiated a new search for her self-identity. Her movement and migration from South to North played a key role in her evolution as the city life transformed her perceptions from rural background to urbanity. In the city, after some initial struggles, Violet was an independent and self-sufficient lady.

Despite such a long stay, she could not adjust with the alien environment of the city. A black at heart who had the spirit of a countryside girl in her, she continuously juggled between her rural self who came to the fore in her personal musings and her urban self which was evident in front of public. In fact, through the character of Violet, Morrison wants to highlight how the Afro-American modernity which was hailed as the golden prospects of the dream world of a city proved to be cultural shock for a Violet. Her life might have been moving in the modernity of the city life, she felt alienated with this cultural transition. The search for self-identity also went haywire because for people like Violet, it was difficult to figure out the kind of identity they wished to possess.

Here too, the problem of nature versus culture where they are considered as mutually exclusive spaces gets surfaced which leads to the identity crisis in individuals. If both had maintained an overlapping position, the issues of alienation, adjustment and identity crisis would never ever have generated. In the city, Violet faced isolation and alienation. Her fragmented self echoed the disillusionment offered by the promised land of the city. Her fractured self was crystal clearly visible in two events. Once she without any reason sat down in middle of the street which expressed the frustration these streets of the city held for her. At another instance, she tried to steal a baby without any provocation. The stealing of baby was also seen by others as the desire for a baby which she hadn't possessed. Her sleeping with a baby doll also signaled this aspect. But, it was more an act of "Public Craziness" (22) than anything else. And this craziness was infused in her by the loneliness and monotonous life of the city. The South and its memories thus became antagonistic to the city life. If South was synonymous to wholeness, North became a place for isolation.

This craziness has its roots in many factors. After marriage with Joe, Violet somehow emerged victorious over her past which was haunted by the loss of her mother Rose Dear. Violet realized that the love she harbored for Joe instilled a feeling of wholeness in her. Joe thus completed her life which was earlier haunted by the loss of her mother who drowned herself in the well. But, the dazzle of the city snatched this wholeness away from her. Her fear of losing Joe as she had lost her mother haunted her in the form of past memories. Violet mother Rose Dear had to bear the burden of raising five children all alone. Her husband didn't take care of the family. Further, she faced the humiliation of eviction. She ultimately resorted to suicide to put an end to all her sufferings.

Being a slave and woman, Rose Dear's life was a saga of sufferings haunted by economic despair and self defeat. During the time of slavery, her family was completely annihilated by the traumas and horrors of slavery. Even after the end of slavery, she had to face discrimination which oppressed her to a great extent. Even her husband was not with her when she was facing the cruel world along with her five little children. But for the sake of her children, she showed a lot of courage. Despite her efforts, she could not support her family economically. Survival became a serious issue because in order to feed her family, she was stripped of all her possessions. Rose Dear could not endure this dispossession and eviction. Hence, she called her mother True Belle.

True Belle somehow sorted their lives but four years after her arrival, Rose Dear committed suicide by jumping into a well. Throughout her life, Violet could not understand why her mother who was bold enough to face the sufferings and tortures of life decided to quit when everything was getting better in their lives. The question that – if Rose Dear decided to continue living even after the white men threw her out of the rocking chair, what was the force which prompted her to commit suicide when things were on the improvement side? Violet made some guesses that she might have committed suicide because she was aware that now her daughters were safe under the guardianship of True Belle.

But this image of well had a deep rooted impact on the psyche of Violet who could never forget her mother Rose Dear. Truly, the well gave Rose Dear a relief from the hopelessness of life which she had felt in all those years of struggle. The suicide of Rose Dear, however, changed the peace of Violet's mind. The fear of losing and fear of not getting true love got seeped in the mind of Violet. After meeting with Joe, Violet hoped to overcome her haunting past, but the city life further pushed her into

the well of loneliness. The strange streets of the city were full of strangers who re-instilled the feeling of loneliness and lack of love for her. And once again she went back to her past to seek relief in the lap of her dead mother.

The story of Violet becomes a story of refusal of love. Violet was completely bereft of the love of her parents especially her mother, her family in Virginia and even the love of her own life. Another hunger of love propelled from her unfulfilled desire of being a mother. Initially, she was reluctant to have a baby. Later on she faced three miscarriages. All this increases a yearning for love in Violet which was clearly evident when she slept with a doll in her lap. All these hungers and hopelessness of the city life made her enter into the world of silence. She didn't feel the need to interact with others. She didn't even talk to Joe who initially brought happiness to her life. The narrator observed, "a poisoned silence" (5) moving around the whole house. She rather puts a lot of birds in a cage and spoke to them in order to find solace. For Joe, this silence of Violet was killing as he could not comprehend the reasons for this silence. He felt infuriated as well as perplexed at her behavior as his wife, "speaks mainly to her birds" (24). Violet and Joe thus drifted themselves apart in the loneliness of the city. In the busy life of the city where they had to just mind their own business amidst the alien strangers walking on the streets of the city, they need to interact and share that loneliness to each other in order to be happy.

Haunted by their past, they failed to connect with each other. The lack of love they faced because of the absences of their respective mothers further created a gulf between the two. Joe got possessive for his mother Wild once again and started his hunt for the love of his mother which literally turned wild. And in his search for his mother Wild, he finally settled for Dorcas, an eighteen year old girl. Though certain critics felt that Violet was responsible for this downfall of relationship as it was she

who chose to be silent with Joe. She stopped interacting with Joe and preferred birds to Joe. But as discussed earlier, her silences had deep roots which emerged out of the fear of losing loved ones.

Here, if one analyses the situation of Joe and Violet from an ecocritical stand point, it becomes clear that how the love for nature and their migration to the urban culture of the city put them in a situation of predicament which ultimately put to end to their happiness. Be it Joe's mother Wild or Violet's mother Rose Dear, each was the epitome of Mother Nature. Both the mothers who symbolized 'mother nature' got exploited by their white masters and had to kill themselves in one or the other way. But, this death of Mother Nature left a deep impact on the subsequent generations of blacks who carried in their blood and soul an inherent love for Mother Nature. Both Joe and Violet failed to get recognition and love from their mothers. It was this anguish and frustration that emerged from this lack of love which prompted them to come close to each other when Joe fell down in the lap of Violet under the walnut tree.

The walnut tree becomes symbolic of the healing power of Nature. It healed the anguished souls of the two characters who were separated from their Mother Nature. But, it was just a temporary solution for both Joe and Violet. Violet for Joe was just a substitute of his mother Wild and for Violet, Joe was just a substitute of Golden Gray, whose stories she heard from True Belle. Golden Grey had instilled in Violet a desire to be white. So, under the walnut tree, Joe became the substitute of that desire. Later on when Violet came to know about Joe's affair with Dorcas, she admitted that how their marriage was just a way to find a substitute to their respective hunts and desires which they had harboured in their hearts for so long.

But temporary solutions never last long. The migration to the North split open their healed wounds once again as they were not permanently healed. Caught between the dichotomies of nature and culture, Joe and Violet once again went on the hunt for their wild past which was marked by their fractured relationship with Mother Nature. Joe assumed the role of hunter once again. In his hunt, he was stopped by Dorcas who touched him in such a way that he felt that his search of his mother Wild had come to an end. The trace marks on her face appeared to him as a track which marked the way he had lost all over these years. These marks Joe remembered were similar to the marks which Wild made on hunter's face when she bit him. These marks actually signified his path to self- understanding which wild Dorcas laid for him. Joe told that Dorcas was her true love. In case of Violet, it was she who chose Joe. Joe was just accepting Violet's choice. But with Dorcas it was completely different. He never chose Violet. She chose him. With Dorcas, he was the one who chose. Thus Dorcas became a dream girl for Joe. He showered all his love on Dorcas which he was not able to shower on Violet who was always busy with her birds and a doll in her arms.

But Dorcas was an unloved child who had become a dangerous woman. Initially she faced rejection from her mother. Then, she lost her parents in a fire, during East Louis Riots. Like other characters, Dorcas who was now orphan and homeless had to migrate to the city to stay in with her aunt Alice Manfred. Alice Manfred was a domineering woman and tried to regulate the life of Dorcas by her obsessive love and care. But Dorcas could not bear this domination. Alice wanted to protect her from the outside manly world of cruelties and tries to dress her up like a child. But, Dorcas, a teenager wanted to make herself look sexually desirable. Dorcas wanted to be admired by others. The lack of love from parents and consequent rebel in her asking for admiration converted Dorcas into a woman with a wild streak in her.

And when she met Joe who was already on his hunt for the wild traces of his mother, he noticed this wild streak in her.

The wild Dorcas was thus hunted down by Joe. Joe had changed himself seven times since childhood. He wanted to change because he was in search of his self-identity. But he was not able to form one. It was Dorcas who put a full-stop to all these changes. The void which was created by Joe's mother and remained empty even with Violet finally got fulfilled by Dorcas.

Violet could not satisfy the wild hunt of Joe. Similarly, Joe couldn't satisfy the wild streak of Dorcas. Joe was always ready to submit to her demands and desires, and never questioned her. She, however, need an authoritative person, who could control her and shape her true identity. She felt that her identity was not shaped by Joe as he accepted her identity as it was. Dorcas's boyfriend, Acton, however, helped her in shaping her self -identity. When Joe came to know about Acton, he could not comprehend the reasons for such a change in Dorcas's behaviour. In order to get the answers to his question, he went on to a final hunt for Dorcas. But, this time his hunt to trace his wild mother, which was perhaps his last hunt, ended in killing Dorcas.

By killing Dorcas, he laid the final claim on her. Dorcas too got affected by the forces of city. As Eusebio L. Rodrigues too remarks, "Lacking the sustenance provided by nature and by the country, cut off suddenly from her mother's nurturing love... Dorcas is a rebel, a wild creature of the city" (161). Her love for Joe was so wild that she allowed herself to bleed to death after Joe shot at her. She even didn't reveal the identity of Joe as a murderer to the police. But, the story of Dorcas is a moving story which shows how a young girl got affected by the traps laid by the city. The city appeared to them to be a dreamland where they were free to do anything and



free to desire anything. But, girls like Dorcas could not understand the trap the city laid for them.

The insidious plans of the city didn't end here. After the death of Dorcas, Joe was always seen crying. On the other hand, Violet was so mentally disturbed by Joe's affair that she forcefully entered the funeral of Dorcas and tried to attack her face with a knife. She even got obsessed with the idea of Dorcas and tried to accumulate maximum information related to her. Her sole purpose was to hunt for the reasons why Joe chose Dorcas over her and fell in love with her. Towards the end of the story, one sees that all three main characters went on for a hunt for something wild which was somehow missing in their lives because of the fragmented and disturbing past of their childhood. All three characters could not get the love of their mothers and went on to search this love. The search also took them to the world of city which was shown to be a wonderland and panacea of all problems. But, the city life rather than healing them crippled them to a greater extent and eventually annihilated them in this process. These characters came to the city in order to trace their self-identity. But the city shattered this dream by further complicating their identities.

When looked through the green lens, eco-critical inclinations of Toni Morrison are clearly visible in the novel. Joe, Violet and Dorcas all three are symbolic of blacks who were deeply attached to their respective mothers, i.e. Mother Nature as hinted upon by Morrison through the name of Joe's mother Wild who represents the wilderness of nature. During slavery all three characters and their mothers faced innumerable tortures and exploitation at the hands of white owners. Nature herself got trampled down and also bore a witness to the miserable living and exploitation of slaves. Wilderness became a site of oppression as it happens in *Beloved* as well. This resulted in a fragmented relationship between nature and blacks. No doubt, blacks felt

that a soul existed in nature and were deeply attached to this mother. But, the curse of slavery had completely fractured this bonding. In order to escape this bane and locate their true identity, these characters found themselves in the dream world of city.

But, amidst the hustle and bustle of the city and monotony which it offered, these characters eventually found themselves in another trap. Though they were initially very happy because the city offered them myriad possibilities to ensure a decent survival, the fetters which the bonds of slavery had placed on them got opened up when they entered the city and became its inhabitants. Blacks' love for nature again and again called them to trace their roots and go once again back to the country side which carried the memories of their mothers, Wild in case of Joe, and Mother Nature in relation to all blacks. But the city life had laid such a trap that they could not come out of it. In this state of pendulum where they constantly juggled between their rural and urban life, their lives became full of silences and absences. At this stage, return to nature was not possible thereby making way for loneliness to enter the lives of all the characters. This isolation, frustration and loneliness once again pushed them to hunt for the wild.

The hunt, however, in the city was not easy and because of the disillusionment this city offered, this hunt converted them in a dangerous way. Joe's shooting of Dorcas, Violet's attack on Dorcas's corpse and Dorcas willing acceptance of death are all emblematic of this dangerous wild streak in them. Blacks couldn't return back to the country but were still haunted by the memories of this rural wild which they considered their mother. On the other hand, city offered no solace to them. Morrison here poses a problem that even after getting freedom from slavery; blacks face this dichotomy of rural versus urban life. Unable to locate themselves, they eventually turn into either dangerous people or people who meet a tragic end. Morrison here

questions the dichotomy between nature and culture. It is only because these two spaces are considered antagonistic and mutually exclusive that such a problem arises in front of blacks. This dichotomy has instilled in blacks the feeling that if they have to choose city, they have to leave their roots of rural side. This predicament of choice becomes a source of their anguish. For Morrison, the solution lies only in clubbing together these two spheres. Both nature and culture have to thrive together and assimilate each other in themselves. The message of love that Felice brought in the lives of Joe and Violet brought happiness in their lives when both the narrator and the readers were expecting something worse to happen.

Felice became the unborn daughter for Violet. Joe too started smiling and took up a work at pay dirt. He now enjoyed his life with Violet and loved her even more. Felice made them understand that they had to stop running to their roots of Nature which they found in the rural country. She told them that city was the reality and we had to accept it. Rather than segregating these twin concepts of nature and culture, Felice asked them to associate them because this association of nature and culture on the land of the city was the only real solution which could bring happiness in the lives of blacks. As Morrison speaks through her character, “How many trees can you look at?”(207).

This is the reality presented by Morrison. Just by going to the countryside and watching trees, one can never strengthen the bond with Nature. The concept of new urbanity which offers a collaboration of both nature and culture can be the only solution. The fictional New York City which Morrison has portrayed in *Jazz* shows the presence of nature in it. Through her characters Joe and Violet, Morrison has linked the urban North with the rural South. Morrison’s efforts are singularly directed to make her readers realize that nature cannot be segregated from the social and

cultural spaces of the city. Even the difference between the two cannot be traced as one looks at the city through the naked eyes.

The narrator of the novel accepted his identification with the city. The narrator here was unable to perceive the boundary which divided landscape and cityscape, thereby denouncing all sorts of demarcations which separated nature and the city. For Morrison, these two concepts can cohabit together and the blacks have to realize it if they want to ensure happiness in the city. The co-existence of river, church and homes of people in fact presents a vista which clubs the elements of both country side and city. Thus *Jazz* emerges as an important fictional narrative which changed the cultural history of America by introducing the notions of new urbanism which incorporated both nature and culture inside it. The early notions of urbanism recognized buildings, cemented homes as the reality of city life which replaced the nature. But in *Jazz*, the notion of new urbanism has presented city as an ecological hybrid space which celebrates the grid structures union with the wild forces of Nature.

Through this novel, Morrison had made a big leap as an environmentalist as she wrote it in the last decade of the twentieth century. The period of 1990s witnessed a sea change in the attitude of masses from nature. City life became a need for the better survival for human beings which drifted them away from nature. But what was more dangerous was the mindset of people which got attuned to the fact that they could never be in communion with nature. Now, this posed a serious threat to environment as it snapped even the last thread which binds man and nature in this world of global environmental crisis. This unhealthy mindset was needed to be changed immediately as it was detrimental both for humans and nature. The present novel emerged as a plea to put restraint to this attitude. The novel as a solution put forth a new concept of urbanity which opened the gates for simultaneous survival of

nature and culture without shunning the existence of city. If *Beloved* was a plea to forget the haunted memories of past, *Jazz* became a plea to accept the reality of present as well as future. While writing *Jazz*, Morrison put off the shroud of a conventional environmentalist and endeavored to save nature by offering a solution with which modern readers could relate to. And therein lies the success of a creative writer like her who carries immense love and concern for nature whenever she takes pen to pour out her heart.

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