

THE DISCOURSE OF DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS IN TONI MORRISON'S *SONG OF SOLOMON*

Anil K Prasad, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of English, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University, Yemen
Emails: aniljyo@yahoo.com, Prasad@y.net.ye

Abstract:

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in 'Race', *Writing and Difference* (1986) has called black people as 'masters of the figurative' (6) and their penchant 'for saying one thing to mean something quite other' has helped them in their survival in oppressive monolithic discursive drives of the Western culture. He further argues that all black texts are necessarily 'two toned', or 'double-voiced' and this 'leads to' a kind of discourse 'which is duplicitous, potentially subversive, one that undermines the universalizing and essentializing tendencies of hegemonic white discourse' (Bennett and Royle, 1995: 203). This tendency has earlier been identified by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* ([1903], 1994) who claimed that 'the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line' (v) and related this problem to the 'double consciousness' of the black psyche, the 'twness- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body' (2). The paper will examine how this 'double-consciousness', this 'two-ness' of 'unreconciled strivings', 'this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge [his] double self into a better and truer self' has been represented through the aforesaid central tension of the text in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977).

Introduction:

In her Nobel Lecture (1993) Toni Morrison said, "We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives". Toni Morrison's novels, in fact, measure the lives of a marginalized community fraught with "an ambivalent consciousness arising from a bicultural identity" (Guerin. et al. 1998: 256) in a multicultural society and also they are the measure of her achievement "as an African-American woman writer how free [she] can be in [her] gendered, sexualized, wholly racialized world". Barbara Christian calls it, in her article "A Race for Theory", a kind of "theorizing" and further comments that she finds it "celebrated, refined and critiqued in the works of writers like Morrison and Walker and is "in the narrative forms, in the stories [we create], in riddles, in proverbs, in the play with language, ... (149). In Toni Morrison's novels from *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *Paradise* (1997) and *Love* (2003) language has been used "as a register for the experience of change" (Willis 1984:263), thereby giving "voice to the experience of growing up black in a society dominated by white" (Ibid. 264). In her discourse of "double-consciousness" representing the black psyche - the personal, the

psychological, the familial, the social, the cultural and the political - "everything is historical" (268). History has created the "two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois 1903:2). How these unreconciled strivings and ideals have been resolved finally as in the case of Pilate and Milkman or are left "unreconciled" in the case of some characters like Ruth, Hagar, Macon Dead II and Guitar seen against the background of the evolution of a literature of encounter and resistance challenging the "universalizing and the essentializing tendencies of the hegemonic white discourse" (Bennett and Royle 1995:203) will be discussed in this paper.

Double-consciousness of the black psyche: Saving one thing to mean another:

In *Song of Solomon* Morrison reveals double consciousness through the "poetics of surrealism" (Willis 1984:264) self-alienation and isolation, through the power of the word, through a collective voice and heteroglossic historical, cultural and political voices critiquing and resisting the racist practices and received notions of manhood offering alternative constructions of self and community (Mobley 1995: 50-52), through "a complex and multitextured world" in which she "calls for an end to Ellisonian inertia and a delight in free fall" (Dixon in Bloom ed. 1990: 175-142), through an art of storytelling incorporating the black vernacular and the oral tradition into the European novelistic tradition basing it on the value system of the society in which the story is told to "reclaim" community and black cultural heritage (Willis 1984: 270) and through "complex interchanges and exchanges between a 'minority' *ethnos* and a broader American culture" (Reynolds 1999:214). Unlike Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) Solomon and his descendents are not invisible they reclaim history through memory and myth and recreate themselves against their own Macons and against the deacons of postethnic racial segregation. In the black bourgeoisie psyche, represented by Macon Dead II, greed for gold has created a shift from love of land to a craving for power and ownership of the Self and the Other. Milkman's quest ironically from North to South comes to a richer understanding of the self but does not end the story of the quest as has been appositely said about the black storytellers by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "as the masters of the figurative" in terms of "saying one thing to mean something quite other" (1986: 6). Therefore, a "linear reading" (Irigaray 1985: 79-80, quoted by Rigney 1991: 28-31) of Morrison's narrative fiction will be misleading and the ambiguity and plurality of its voice and stance can not be successfully reached at and explored. The last sentence of *Song of Solomon* tells us, "metaphorically", of Milkman's realignment with history (Heinze 1993: 164-168) through "the voice of a larger history" "he "flies into history and responsibility rather than out of it" out of a "narcissistic and selfish" personality and "a family that is life-denying" (Byerman 1990: 70-76); "For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it" (SS 337). His ride through the air defamiliarizes the earlier legendary black Icarus image of the flying Africans from authority and repression including the mock-heroic flight of Robert Smith in the opening of the novel by envisioning a future through a folkloric, historical aesthetic tradition in which an individual can be empowered

"with a new sense of self-ownership" (*Beloved*, 1987: 260) freeing oneself from dependence on external conditions of self-image of a Pecola Breedlove or being transformed into a contemporary 'tar baby'. This new awareness of the self and manhood is dramatized on a psychological historical space of what Du Bois has called in his *The Souls of Black Folk*, a "twoness- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (1903: 2) illustrated in *Song of Solomon* through a fallaciously proud possessive pragmatism of a Macon Dead II and the instinctively defying temper of a Pilate.

Susan Willis' profound and perceptive discovery of "the use of lack, deformity and self-mutilation as figures of liberation" (1984: 278) in Morrison's fictive discourse account for Morrison's portrayal of Pilate who is born with a surrealistic abdomen without a stereotypicality of the sign of an umbilical chord on her stomach which is described as "blind as a knee" (SS 148). This leads to her self-alienation "physically" as Polly Breedlove's "alienation is the purposeful denial" (Ibid. 266) of bodily pleasure as a trope of distancing, estrangement and disaffection. But in the case of Pilate it is not the purposeful denial of the bodily pleasure, not the purposeful defiance of a white hegemonic gaze but the gaze of the double-consciousness of a Macon Dead II, her own brother who is more white than black. Her defiance, unlike the violent defiance of the members of the Seven Days who believe in violent and vengeful encounter is balanced and regenerative as beautifully transmitted through the double-voiced discourse of Morrison's narrative in the episode when Pilate is teaching Milkman and Guitar two young members of a black community the process of cooking "a perfect soft-boiled egg", telling them, "the water and the egg have to meet each other on a kind of equal standing. One can't get the upper hand over the other" (SS 37-38). The Self and the Other can be on the equal standing in a society in which senseless revenge cannot be a solution as evident by the resistance caused by the contemporary radical Black organizations in their "militant, outgoing, activism and revolt" with their "dedication to a gospel of the gun" (Gates, Jr. and McKay Eds. 1997: 1794-95). The two divided selves of an individual belonging to a black community should be balanced otherwise there would be Macons on the one hand and the Guitars and the Milkmen on the other. The Macons would be having white masks on the black skin and the Guitars and the Milkmen would be just lost in the world offering meandering direction leading to a nowhere land.

It is "No wonder" (the expression repeatedly used by Hagar before she dies SS 308), after realizing "lightness and power" from a dream of flying and having deciphered through "listening and memorizing" the true meaning of the song of Solomon Milkman decides to go to Pilate instead of going home. He goes for tradition, past, perception, instinct, memory and roots. This shows his direction from a divided self to an integrated self that is what Morrison means by "an escape from the stereotyped black settings" (quoted in "Biographical information on Toni Morrison"). The setting of the sixties in mid-western America with the use of Morrison's conviction in the folkloric destiny of mankind with her profound moral vision employing the linguistic possibilities and potentialities of a vernacular takes

the narrative to the level where shared realities of an American society are manifested discursively in psychological and historical terms.

Another signifying aspect of this double-toned discourse is the episode in which Hagar is on a shopping spree after a feeling of alienation ("I look terrible" SS 308) resulting from her treatment of Milkman. Reba's diamond was pawned and she bought dresses, cosmetics and perfumes like "a smiling sleepwalker" believing "she could spend her life there among the cut glass, shimmering in peaches and cream, in satin. In opulence, in luxe. In love." (SS 311). Like the haunting dream of the blue eyes of the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye* she died haunted by what Milkman likes in a girl of his dreams, repeating hysterically: "He loves silky hair", "Penny-colored hair", "And lemon-colored skin", "And gray-blue eyes", "And thin nose". Like Macon Dead's conception of life based on dominating others by the power of wealth, Hagar's conception of love and being loved are based on a craving for the self-image that is psychologically, socially and historically conditioned, that is divided into what has been characterized as "peculiar dualities and conflicts in African American self-perception" (Gates, Jr. and Mckay Eds. 1997: 607).

These dualities and conflicts of self-perception occur in *Song of Solomon* when Milkman is on his journey for grabbing "gold". For him, Macon Dead's father's exhortation comes as a sharp contrast to his father's conception of life and way of living. Milkman hears it. It said:

Stop picking around the edges of the world. Take advantage, and if you can't take advantage, take disadvantage. We live here. On this planet, in this nation, in this country right here. Nowhere else! We got a home in this rock, don't you see! Nobody starving in my home, and if I got a home you got one too! Grab this land! Take it, hold it, my brothers, make it, my brothers, shake it, squeeze it, turn it, twist it, beat it, kick it, kiss it, whip it, stomp it, dig it, plow it, seed it, reap it, rent it, buy it, sell it, own it, build it, multiply it, and pass it on- can you hear me? Pass it on? (SS 235)

On the other hand, Milkman's father tells him:

Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too. (SS 55)

Both the fathers talk about ownership, the former believes in the physical, natural and spiritual ownership of land and the latter believes in the material ownership of things. The former dies for his land ("They blew him five feet up into the air"(SS 40)) and the latter dies for gold ("Other than the bright and roving eyes of Magdelene called Lena and First Corinthians, the Packard had no real lived life at all. So they call it Macon Dead's hearse" (SS 33)). The former had "the only farm in

the county that grew peaches" " [a] farm that colored their lives like a paintbrush and spoke to them like a sermon" (SS 234-235) the latter was "a colored man of property" (SS 23) and "indeed a successful man" (SS 31) By presenting a contrast between the father and the son, Toni Morrison seems to rewrite the African American history and culture from the time of slavery to the present showing the effect of the economic changes on the lives of the African Americans. It has been rightly commented by Melvin Dixon:

Macon is a kind of invisible man Milkman refuses to be....Milkman's struggle enlarges the orbit of geography for Afro-American identity and cultural performance beyond the cave of hibernation promoted in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (in Bloom Ed. 1991: 130-142)

For Macon Dead's father's life is on the land for the purposes of "procreation and harvest" " not for hibernation and greed" (Ibid.). Milkman emerges from the deadening effects of a family based on misrepresented life style and reestablishes the values of family and community through self-empowerment resulting from the understanding of the mystery of the legendary history of a family which has become a folklore for the community. The denial of past will be "denial of power, of hope, of delivery" (Campbell 1946: x) as in Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *Love* (2003) the denied past becomes a haunting presence but eventually when it is identified, it has redeeming effect on Sethe and Bill Cozey respectively. This identification in historical and cultural terms will be achieved only when an individual, as Sethe says, reclaims the ownership of his freed self. As has been correctly said, Milkman's "journey also reveals the significance of the historical and cultural self. Milkman cannot become complete until he (re)connects the loose historical cords of his memory. He must 're-remember' them" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 1990: 53) .

The end of *Song of Solomon* is another dimension of a black writer's use of ambiguity. In Salon Interview (Morrison: 1998), Toni Morrison speaks of " not even closing the book" " to expand articulation.... leaving the endings open for reinterpretation, revisitation, a little ambiguity." Critics are having widely different views, the way Morrison concludes *Song of Solomon*. It is open-ended. Again a linear reading of the text will be misleading. The text (the scene of Milkman's flying in this case) should be read as Gary Storhoff (1997: 302) has convincingly argued " within the framework of Milkman's affirming his family relations while simultaneously separating himself from the enmeshed structure that has heretofore been his entire emotional life, Milkman's liberation is, as Morrison asserts, a 'marvellous epiphany' " (*Conversations* 232). Therefore, Milkman's flight is not a suicidal act of cowardice and defeatism as suggested by Branner (1987:13-24) and Lubiano (in Smith. Ed. 1995: 93-116) but viewing it from the perspective of a double-toned narrative it is a flight that points towards freedom but it also involves risks of death and leaving behind a family as in the case of Solomon/Shalimar whose wife had gone distracted after his flight. Unlike the mythic superhuman flight of his ancestor, Milkman's flight is rooted in reality, reality of an African American community that should be redefined dialectically to make a paradise

based on love and understanding in which Ruths and Macons should not recreate another discourse of slavery by their bourgeoisie possessive white middle class values and Pilates should not be made pariahs in their own communities. As Bernard Bell (2003) writes in "Dual Tradition of African American Fiction":

As black American authors develop their distinctive voices within and against the larger tradition of fiction, this intent is also implicit in the double consciousness that is encoded in African American fiction. Thematically and structurally, therefore, from Brown and Wilson to Reed, Morrison, Delany, and Butler, the dual tradition of African American fiction is dominated by the dialectical tension between oral and literary traditions, by the struggle for freedom from all forms of oppression, and by the personal odyssey to realize the full potential of one's complex biracial and bicultural identity as an African American. (see *Microsoft Encarta Library* 2003)

From the 'narrative of hibernation' and the 'gospel of the gun' towards the narrative of self-creation and cultural transformation:

"As a postmodernist and vernacularly structured text, *Song of Solomon* dramatizes the deconstruction of narrative convention, the complications of race, and the struggles over identification in ways that bring to narrative life the nexus of the personal and the political" (Lubiano in Smith. Ed. 1995: 93-116). Besides, it extends the boundaries of historical and geographical spaces of the conventional teleological progression of the storyline from "the narrative of hibernation" (Morrison's Interview by Robert B Stepto 1979: 213-29) towards the narrative of self-creation and cultural transformation by changing the directions of cultural history and by re-constructing new physical and metaphorical landscapes (Dixon in Bloom. Ed. 1991: 115-130). Morrison's fictional narratives are a constant remapping of these geographical and historical spaces redefining "the interplay of Eurocentric and Afrocentric symbolic systems" "to make sense of the unreconciled strivings and folk wisdom embedded in their frequently ironic, parodic and open-ended texts" "celebrating self-redemptive, community-empowering values of black American life" (see Bell, *Microsoft Encarta Library* 2003).

Renouncing the principles of a past which are based on domination, Milkman "sore of foot, sick to his stomach" (SS 257), literally and metaphorically, follows the "tracks" of Pilate. Unlike Ellison's invisible protagonist whose identity is shaped by how other people define him ("I am invisible... simply because people refuse to see me". "I am neither dead nor in a state of suspended animation. Call me Jack-the-Bear, for I am in a state of hibernation ." *Invisible Man* 1952, in Gates. Jr. and McKay Eds. 1997: 1518-1519) Milkman undergoes ordeals after ordeals and eventually defines himself encompassing the entire gamut of history and geography of a black American, so to say, "Africa, the transatlantic or Middle Passage, slavery, Southern plantation traditions, emancipation, Reconstruction, post-Reconstruction, Northern Migration, urbanization and racism" (Bell 1987:5). The first part of the

novel portrays his life as "pointless, aimless" (SS 107), and "[H]e felt like a garbage pale" (SS 120):

He was bored. Everybody bored him. The city was boring. The racial problems that consumed Guitar were the most boring of all. He wondered what they would do if they didn't have black and white problems to talk about. Who would they be if they couldn't describe the insults, violence, and oppression that their lives (and the television news) were made of? If they didn't have Kennedy or Elijah to quarrel about? They excused themselves for everything. (SS 108-09)

This feeling of aimlessness was further aggravated by "the brilliant bitterness between his father and his mother, a bitterness as smooth and fixed as steel" (SS 126), "the calculated violence" (SS 128) of the "messed-up lady", (SS 152) Hagar and the hatred of his sister Magdalene called Lena who calls him a "sad, pitiful, stupid, selfish, hateful man" (SS216). Milkman is not convinced by Guitar's "gospel of the gun" though with "Guitar as his co-conspirator, Milkman could look forward to both fun and fear" (SS 177), temporarily believes in the hypnotic discourse of his father which allures him to a false path of freedom based on a fake sense of ownership, "You'll own it all, All of it. You'll be free. Money is freedom, Macon. The only real freedom there is". But he replies, "I know, Daddy, I know... I just want to be my own" (SS 163). "He just wanted to beat a path away from his parents' past" (SS 180). He meets Rev. Cooper. He meets Circe. He goes to the cave. On his way to the cave, like "Ike MacCaslin's repudiation of the trappings of civilization (e.g. compass and watch)" (Prasad 2004), he "is stripped of all the symbols of the dominant culture" (Byerman in Bloom 1990 70-76). Like Ike McCaslin in Faulkner's *The Bear* he is on his way to realize that youth is not for glory but for responsibility, to grasp the proper meaning of human beings in a society which is, for Milkman, hidden in the song of Solomon/Shalimar sung by children, for Ike MacCaslin it is buried in the ledgers of the Chancery and for Pilate, ironically, locked up in the bag of bones not of the white man but of her own dead father which she was carrying calling it "her inheritance" (SS 163).

Unlike the existential vacuum of the invisible man, *Song of Solomon* "aims to achieve a total, authentic personality for its hero" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 1990: 53) Ellison's use of language is also an employment of "a metaphor or allegory of the invisible man to counter the worn coin of representation", it is a "metaphor for the marginality, effacement and dehumanization of the black people in the United States". (Bennett and Royle 1995: 82-83). But Morrison's Milkman is an agent of change, of self-creation and cultural transformation rather than of musings in a self-conscious cave of hibernation. He too traverses the past. But his "descent into the past means stepping out of reified and fetishized relationships" (Willis 1984:272). He is at once a symbol of a black bicultural member of a materialistic society goaded with the greed of gold, with the vanity of a peacock and a mythical metamorphosis of Ulysses, Oedipus and Daedalus into one. He must give up his greed for gold symbolized as stated above in his gradual leaving behind

of his acquisitiveness so that he can experience his "reform and rebirth" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 1990: 66). Now in the midst of the barks of the hunting dogs, in the darkness of the jungle, in the maze of his "troublesome thoughts":

There was nothing here to help him – not his money his car, his father's reputation, his suit, or his shoes. In fact, they hampered him. Except for his broken watch, and his wallet with about two hundred dollars, all he had started out with on his journey was gone: his suitcase with the Scotch, the shirts, and the space for bags of gold; his snap-brim hat, his tie, his shirt, his three-piece suit, his shocks, and his shoes. His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was Eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch – and some other sense that he did not have: an ability to separate out, of all the things there were to sense, the one that life itself might depend on. (SS 277)

Then he feels "a sudden rush of affection for them all" (SS 278), for the people of his community, "he felt the sweet gum's surface roots cradling him like the rough but maternal hands of a grandfather" (SS 279) and finally,

he found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth. Walking it like he belonged on it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there – on the earth and on the place where he walked. And he did not limp. (SS 281)

Unlike the weighed down peacock described with metaphor of vanity of his earlier stage of his personality development now the peacock of his self-created, transformed and liberated personality "soared away and lit on the hood of a blue Buick" (SS 283). He learns to share by himself with those who he meets on his journey Calvin, Omer, children and Sweet, he learns to fight by himself with a broken bottle with those who he encounters on his journey, and he learns to discover by himself in the hidden meaning of the children's song his family history and pride. This kind of learning is possible only when he realizes that even without language "when a man could sit down with an ape and the two converse; when a tiger and a man could share the same tree, and each understood the other" (SS 278) unlike the members of his family who never understand each other living under the same roof.

Like Ike MacCaslin's encounter with the Big Ben in *The Bear*, Milkman's encounter with the Bobcat during his hunting expedition with Calvin and Luther is demystifying. When Omer and Calvin are preparing the Bobcat ready for breakfast Milkman is once again having his silent reverberations of his "troublesome thoughts": "Everybody wants a black man's life", "Not his dead life; I mean his living life" and finally these echoes end with his catching of Bobcat's heart. It was like Ike MacCaslin's initiation into the ritual bear-hunt that would lead to his

maturation, his ability to come to terms with realities not merely a "potentially permanent postponement of a resolution" (Bennett and Royle 1995:91) through the incessant chatting with Guitar in Part I of *Song of Solomon*, is reminiscent of the talk of the two tramps in Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* where humanity bereft of the protective props of society is condemned to interminable waiting which is both slapstick and petrifying.

Realigning the community with a reinterpretation of history:

Song of Solomon is a mythical, magico-realistic account of realigning the community with a reinterpretation of history. In Chapter 7, Morrison, by using an omniscient point of view, facilitates for the readers an understanding of the family history of the Deads along with the understanding of the plights the remaining victims are in:

Six days after the first Macon Dead died, his children, a twelve-year-old Pilate and a sixteen-year-old Macon Dead, found themselves homeless. Bewildered and grieving, they went to the home of the closest colored person they knew: Circe, the midwife who had delivered them both and who was there when their mother died and when Pilate was named. She worked in a large house – a mansion - outside Danyville, for a family of what was then called gentlemen farmers. The orphans called to Circe from the vegetable garden early in the morning as soon as they saw the smoke from the cook stove rising. Circe let them in, pressing her hands together with relief, and saying how glad she was to see them alive. She hadn't known what had happened to them after the killing. Macon explained that his had buried his father himself, down by the part of the stream on Lincoln's Heaven where they used to fish together, the place where he had caught the nine-pound trout. The grave was shallower than it ought to be, but he'd piled rocks together. (SS 165-166)

After the murder of their father they have become orphans and they have taken shelter in the "home of the closest colored person". The narrator tells us that Circe is relieved to see them "alive" and Macon "buried his father himself" but the "grave was shallower than it ought to be". Later we come to know that Pilate has an earring in which she had kept her name and she has kept her mother's memory by remembering "the sunbonnet with blue ribbons on it" (SS 167). Byerman (in Bloom 1990: 70-76) aptly says that "Pilate has a history and a true name, which she literally carries with her in a small brass box fashioned into an earring". By carrying her name which was insistently given to her by her dead father she carries the family history too. *Song of Solomon* is replete with the sweet remembrance of Pilate of her dead father sometimes direct sometimes bordering on magic realism in her "posthumous communion" (SS 139) with her dead father, as she acknowledges to

Ruth, "It's a good feeling to know he's around. I can tell you he's a person I can always rely on. ... He's the *only* one" (SS 141). On the contrary, her brother Macon Dead II despite knowing fully well "loung[ing] around the barbershop and swap stories with the men there" "for years hadn't had that kind of time, or interest". He tells his son and his voice sounded different to Milkman. Less hard, and his speech was different. More southern and comfortable and soft". (SS 52) But he is telling all these to his son to keep him away from Pilate. One can see Macon Dead II through the words of Magdalene called Lena at the end of Part II of *Song of Solomon* to understand his transformation from a helping hand at his father's farm to a "colored man of property" (SS 23), an owner of things in order to own other people, to dominate others, to be like the gentlemen farmers of his father's days.

Lena's recollection of childhood presents her father more appalling and apathetic than a white-skinned slave-owner trying to show his family's superiority creating envy among the comparatively poor people of his own community, separating himself and his children from them, living in a "cave of sleep" (SS 11) in which his wife Ruth's description as a lighthouse-keeper and a prisoner reminds us of Faulkner's portrayal of the alienated existence of Miss Emily Grierson in "A Rose for Emily". Lena's cry is the cry of despair through the characteristic "two-toned" discourse of Morrison's narrative. Lena fed up with her sterile life of making paper roses in her father's golden prison-house screeches like a caged-bird: "First he displayed us, then he splayed us. All our lives were like that: he would parade us like virgins through Babylon, then humiliate us like whores in Babylon." Referring to her father's cruelty towards Porter who has fallen in love with Corinthians, she adds, "Now he has knocked the ice out of Corinthians' hand again. ... And you are to blame. You are a sad, pitiful, stupid, selfish, hateful man" (SS 215). Guitar has similar feelings about Milkman's father, "...your father is a very strange Negro.... He behaves like a white man, thinks like a white man." (SS 223). Then, it is fitting that Milkman's journey, his "flight" for gold, must begin with getting away from his father's area of influence. He is following the "tracks" of Pilate the one who keeps a geography book. "At the Pittsburgh airport he discovers that Danville was 240 miles northeast" (SS 226) and from there he went to Virginia and after reaching there he "wondered why black people ever left the South" (SS 260). By sending Milkman from North to South, Morrison "alters the direction of cultural history" (Dixon in Bloom 1990: 130-142). A new history of the country should be written, Morrison seems to emphasize, to mitigate the double-consciousness of the black psyche. The threads of the unwritten history should be brought together to explore new spaces where identities are not based on synecdoche(s) of color, where color-line is not considered as a cultural signifier. After reading the song of Solomon, the unwritten text of history, Milkman's self does not lack coherence, on the contrary, he experiences "a coming together of the features into a total self" (SS 69). Milkman's quest for acceptance is the reclamation of the myth of the 'flying Africans' as a redeeming, strengthening act of 'riding' onto history.

Song of Solomon: an 'unwritten text of history and culture':

Guy Reynolds (1999:195) writing about the twentieth century American women writers aptly remarked that "their prose is stippled with the traces (rhythms, idioms, and motifs) of an ethnic vernacular culture. The myth of the 'flying African' is part of that culture. Robert Hayden's (1913-1982) poem "O Daedalus, Fly Away Home" (1962 in Gates, Jr. and McKay Eds. 1997: 1505) is an illustration of this popular myth: "O cleave the air fly away home/ My gran, he flew back to Africa/Just spread his arm and flew away home". As Amiri Baraka (quoted in Smith: 1998) says, "Ms Morrison has a grasp of that old folk wit". He further says, "It deformatises the situation. It makes it easier to grasp as a human point." The use of folkloric imagination, as Morrison herself says, in a series of lectures given in 1990 at Harvard University published as *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*:

. . . concerns the use of stories of slavery and rejection "as a means of meditation -- both safe and risky -- on one's own humanity. Such analyses will reveal how the representation and appropriation of that narrative provides opportunities to contemplate limitation, suffering, rebellion, and to speculate on fate and destiny . . . ethics, social and universal codes of behavior, and assertions about and definitions of civilization and reason. (quoted in Rev. of *Playing in the Dark*... by Steiner, Wendy [1992] 1997 <http://www.nytimes.com/>)

Through folkloric imagination, the myth of the 'flying African' speaks of a magical historical tradition and a desire to escape oppression and to "fly away home". Morrison's use of the motif of flying in *Song of Solomon* runs consistently throughout the narrative from the abortive mock-heroic flight of the insurance agent Robert Smith from the roof of the Mercy Hospital to the heroic flight of the agent of change Milkman from Solomon's Leap at the end of the novel. The song of Solomon is a powerful unwritten text of history and culture that has been used very significantly in the narrative that powerfully resists the universalizing and essentializing tendencies of hegemonic white discourse. It is both a simple song sung by children and a mysteriously potent message for change deciphered by adults to mend the course of a fractured and misrepresented history by going back to the past, to quote from the Frost's poem "Directive": "Here are your waters and your watering place/Drink and be whole again beyond confusion". The song of Solomon is such kind of "watering place" for Milkman. This is what Stuart Hall (1990: 111) has called "the act of imaginative rediscovery" of the "hidden histories". It gives him a powerful feeling for flying, the motif that is used by Morrison throughout the novel and with the idea of which Milkman was obsessed with since his childhood. It is indeed a new development in the genre of modern American narrative fiction which mingles the personal, the familial, the psychological, the cultural, the political and the historical in one aesthetic medium to counteract the problem of

misrepresentation of the black psyche by employing what Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1997: 9) has called "lyrical super-naturalism".

Conclusion:

On the surface, Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, unmistakably, is a story of postethnic slavery and racism. Metaphorically, it is more than that in incorporating the complex realities of social change showing its influence on the two generations of Afro-Americans bringing the past into their lives alive and transformed, a means to transform their lives which might mitigate the double-consciousness of a black psyche. The dualities might be dissolved, Morrison seems to suggest, throughout her story, by bringing about a change both from within and without. Wealth and social status give freedom but there is always a risk of wearing a white mask on a black skin. Therefore, there is a need to unmask the self, to empower the community by empowering the individual self, and to recreate new spaces of history and geography by reconnecting the past with the present for a future in which the Milkmen of today would not make themselves 'invisible' thinking of what the others think of them instead they should be the active agents of change.

The use of the "figurative language has the capacity to 'defamiliarize' the world – to refigure, reform, revolutionize", (Bennet and Royle 1995: 83) by extending the imaginative spectrum of the existing social reality with all the complexities. Evidently, the complexities inherent in the double-consciousness will be explored more fully and successfully by a non-linear reading, "the possibility of what Edward Said calls 'contrapuntal reading' (Said 1993: 78, quoted in Bennett and Royle, 1995: 203) of the Afro-African narratives particularly the narratives of the black female writers like Toni Morrison "which might help us begin to move beyond racial essentialism, beyond the repressive politics of identity" (Ibid.) both from within and without.

Works Cited

Beckett, Samuel (1948) *Waiting For Godot*, Ed. Javed Malick (1989) New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bell, Bernard (1987) *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press

_____ (2003) "Dual Tradition of African American Fiction" Microsoft Encarta Library.

Bennett, Andrew and Nicholas Royale (1995), *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* England: Prentice Hall.

Biographical Information on Toni Morrison (ND)
<http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~lakhia/morrison/biograph.html>

Bloom, Harold, Ed. (1991) *Toni Morrison: Modern Critical Views*, New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publications.

Branner, Gerry (1987) "Song of Solomon: Morrison's Rejection of Rank's Monomyth and Feminism" *Studies in American Fiction* 15 (1987), pp 13-24.

Byerman, Keith E (1991) "Beyond Realism: The Fictions of Toni Morrison", in *Toni Morrison: Modern Critical Views*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publications, pp 55-84.

Campbell, Jane (1986) *Mythic Black Fiction: The Transformation of History* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Christian, Barbara (1990) "A Race for Theory", in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, Padmini Mongia Ed. (1996) New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Originally published in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, Abdul R. JanMohammed and David Lloyd, Eds. (1990) Oxford University Press, pp 37-49.

Dixon, Melvin (1991) "Like an Eagle in the Air", in *Toni Morrison: Modern Critical Views*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publications, pp 115-142

Du Bois, W.E.B. ([1903] 1994) *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Publications. Inc.

Ellison, Ralph, W. (1952) *Invisible Man*, in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Nellie Y McKay, Ed. (1997) *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, pp 1518-1540.

Frost, Robert (1969) "Directive", in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* Ed. Edward Connery Lathem, New York, Chicago and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p 377.

Faulkner, William (1942) *The Bear*, in *Three Famous Short Novels: Spotted Horse, Old Man, The Bear* (1961) New York: Vintage Books, pp 185-316.

_____ (1972) "A Rose for Emily", in *Six Short Stories*, Ed. W.H. Peters, New York and London.: United University Press, pp 22-36.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. (1986), "Race", *Writing and Difference* Chicago: University of Chicago press.

_____ (1997) "Harlem on Our Mind" , *Critical Inquiry*, 24, pp 1-12.

_____ Ed(1984) *Black Literature and Literary Theory* London: Methuen.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and Nellie Y McKay, Eds. (1997) *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Guerin, Wilfred, L. et al. (1998) *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, New York: Harper & Row.

Hall, Stuart (1990) "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, Padmini Mongia Ed. (1996) New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Originally published in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Jonathan Rutherford, Ed. (1990), Lawrence and Wishart, pp 222-37.

Hayden, Robert (1962) "O Daedalus, Fly Away Home" , in Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and Nellie Y McKay, Eds. (1997) *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., p 1505.

Heinze, Denise (1991) *The Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels*, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.

Irigaray, Lucy (1985) quoted by Rigney, Barbara Hill (1991) *The Voices of Toni Morrison*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Lubiano, Wahencema (1995) " The Postmodernist Rag: Political Identity and the Vernacular", in Valerie, Smith Ed. *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, Cambridge University Press, pp 93-116.

Morrison, Toni (1970) *The Bluest Eye*, New York: Washington Square Press.

_____ (1977) *The Song of Solomon*, New York: Penguin Books. (All the quotations in the paper are from this edition)

_____ (1981) *Tar Baby*, New York: Knopf.

_____ (1987) *Beloved*, New York: Plume

_____ (1992) *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

_____ (1998) *Paradise*, New York: Knopf

_____ (2003) *Love*, New York: Knopf.

_____ (1979) "Intimate Things in Place": A Conversation With Toni Morrison". Interview by Robert B. Stepto, in *Chant of Saints: A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art and Scholarship*, Ed. Michael S Harper and Robert B Stepto, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp 213-229.

_____ (1993) "Nobel Prize Lecture", <http://www.nobelprize.org/Literature/laureate/1993/morrison-lecture.html>

_____ (1994) *Conversations With Toni Morrison* Ed. Danille Taylor-Gutherie, Jackson: University of Mississippi.

_____ (1998) *Toni Morrison: The Salon Interview* by Zia Jaffrey, Salon, <http://dr.salon.com/books/int./1998/02/02/cov-st-02/index.html>

Prasad, Anil K. (2004) "Faulkner and Environmental Imagination: Semiotics of Culture, Nature and Human Nature", paper presented at the international Conference on *William Faulkner in the 21st Century* sponsored jointly by English Department of Peking University and the Study Center for Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, China, May 27-30, 2004.

Reynolds, Guy (1999) Chapter-8: "Fiction for the Village: Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, Cynthia Ozick", in *Twentieth Century American Women's Fictions: A Critical Introduction*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., pp 195-237.

Said, Edward (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto and Windus.

Samuels and Hudson_Weems (1990) *Toni Morrison*, Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Smith, Dinitia (1998) "Toni Morrison's Mix of Tragedy, Domesticity and Folklore", <http://www.nytimes.com/libraru/books/010898/toni-morrison-interview.html#2>

Steiner, Wendy (1992/1997) Rev. of Toni Morrison (1992) *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, <http://www.nytimes.com/>

Storhoff, Gary (1997) "Anaconda Love": Parental Enmeshment in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, *Style*, Volume 31, No. 2, Summer 1997, pp 290-309.

Willis, Susan (1984) "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison", in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., London: Methuen, pp 262-283.