

FOLK MODES OF NARRATION IN TONI MORRISON'S FICTION

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DECLARATION

I, Kevileno Sakhrie, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, and that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/ institute.


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Abbreviations of Titles of Novels

The Bluest Eye---BE

Sula---S

Song of Solomon---SoS

Tar Baby---TB

Beloved---B

Jazz---J

Paradise---P

Introduction

One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

W.E.B. Du Bois

In African-American literature, the quest for identity is a dominant motif. For writers of African descent, thematically and structurally, the journey to realize the full potential of their complex bi-cultural and bi-racial identity as African-Americans has been the focal point. In this connection, the history of African interactions with colonial forces on the continent and their inherent experiences in other lands play an essential role in the creation of the black¹ literary point of view. Identity is thus an important yet particularly elusive term in the context of black American culture, with its multiple dislocations and its long history of destabilizing social and psychological experience. It is complicated too by an awareness of W.E.B. Du Bois's famous concept of "double consciousness,"² by the recognition of the "mask" and the "performance" of the black self in response to white dominance.³ (The interchangeable use of the terms "African-American" and "black" have been explained in the Endnotes.)

Any examination of black literature must take this historical context, the attitudes engendered by this history, and the renewal

accompanying the rewriting of this history. For African-American writers of fiction, it often becomes necessary to challenge and interrogate hegemonic discourse to counter the distortions of received history, and to reconstitute the reality of their own experiences from an African and African-American viewpoint. In such a situation, the African tradition in African-American literature makes for a literary creation that “embodies many different ways in which the African American writer explores what Africa is, what it means to him or her, and what it means to the world.”⁴ Often, for these writers, this means a return to the longstanding oral tradition and its variations for creative appropriation of indigenous modes of imaginative expression and articulation of alternative perspectives.

As a writer of African descent, Toni Morrison attaches great importance to the reclamation of an identity and voice in black writing. All of her novels, from *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *Love* (2003), testify to the multi-layered nature of black identity. As such, Morrison’s concern with the multiplicity of African-American identities and experience is indeed central to her writing. This concern is evident not only in her representation of the interface of black and white America – the racial divide that is in the foreground for so many black writers before her – but in her awareness of the multiple affiliations and points of difference within black communities as they relate to issues of class, gender, and

geographical locations. Her marked interest in historical periods of transition and the social transitions that she explores also reveal their impact on gender roles, and the separation of classes.

In response to the displacements they suffered ever since their forced transportation from their homelands to other continents, African-Americans, particularly in the American South, “embraced and deepened their cultural traditions as a means of survival and as a chosen separation from mainstream American culture.”⁵ However, as Morrison shows, the migrations to the urban North following historical and sociological events cause many of her protagonists to forget the South with all its repressive connotations and often painful memories. At the same time, the South retains a central place in communal memory and an abiding reality for those who still live there. Through its interconnections by way of the slave trade, the Middle Passage, and the colonial experience, with Africa and the Caribbean –black history is suffused with the presence of “Africanisms”⁶ that forms an ineradicable part of its culture. Consequently, Morrison’s novels feature salient African elements regarding language, worldviews, folklore, and religion on which she relies for her themes and narrative structures, images and metaphors, and artistic and ethical principles.

Toni Morrison's concern therefore, as a "black woman writer,"⁷ is to reclaim and find her place within black cultural history. An in-depth study of her novels reveal her effort at capturing "the something that defines what makes a book 'Black.'"⁸ In many other places and contexts, she has reiterated her black cultural orientation and commitment to reclaiming the oral traditions of Africa and Africa-America in her writings. Her own theories of art, developed over time, are grounded on an oral environment that is "Afrocentric," which means "literally, placing African ideals at the center of any thesis that involves African culture and behavior."⁹ As an Afrocentric writer, she seeks to articulate a cosmology that reflects her African cultural background, including its views of space, time and reality as a means of confronting hegemonic distortions projecting the experiences of African-Americans. At the same time, the qualifier, "woman" before "writer," in defining herself, constitutes her response not only to cultural nationalism, but also to the historical exclusion of black women to authorship and self-representation. This assertion can be considered as a telling shift in African-American literature.

Throughout their literary career, black women novelists have been consistently preoccupied with the imaging of the black woman as a 'whole' character or 'self.' Hazel Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood*

implies the importance of self-definition in the tradition of black women novelists, a tradition in which they, as “published writers,” “had to confront the dominant...ideologies...of womanhood which excluded them from the definition ‘woman.’”¹⁰ All too often, the complexity and distinctiveness of the history of black women, from the legacy of their African past and slave experience to their experience with industrialization and modern corporate America, have been ignored. Like other black women novelists of the contemporary period, Morrison explores and analyses the relationship between race, gender and class assumptions afflicting black people. She is concerned with sexual politics as they affect women and shows how sexist behaviour, both within and outside the bounds of the black community, can be oppressive. However, on the subject of developing a specific black feminist model of critical enquiry, Morrison states,

there is more danger in it than fruit, because any model of criticism or evaluation that excludes males from it is as hampered as any model of criticism of Black literature that excludes women from it.¹¹

Although Morrison disagrees with a black feminist model of criticism, she rejects the implicit assumption that men, black or white, spoke for both genders. She has characterized her career as an attempt to explore the kinds of experience that black male writers have failed to encompass in their work. According to her, the black male voice could

articulate the experience of blackness but not femaleness. She identifies the 'place' where the female voice originates as the site for self-definition and self-love whose nourishment comes from reclamation of ancestry. Black women can reclaim their history by writing about it. The need to reclaim this past in order to define the female self in terms of inherited culture is both a feminist and racial urge. And Morrison offers a new kind of cultural positioning that is more inclusive of black women and their role in the larger racial struggle. Hence, a part of this project is to analyze some of the African influences in the writings of Toni Morrison, where they serve as metaphors of the cultural and social resistance of black women.

In returning to the traditions of orality, Morrison identifies discrete images of female identity that invoke the spirituality and strength of women in African iconography. Her work pays tribute to the women who have retained the traditional values and folk arts of their original culture and to their roles as carriers of traditions of resistance and survival. Her stories contribute towards a positive valuation of black women's "ancient properties." These "properties," as her works emphasize, are important for African-American women in order to reclaim their position in racist and sexist environments in the West. To be

a true culture bearer and community maker, black women must remember the wisdom of their ancestors.

Morrison believes that her work must transmit cultural knowledge that provides the key to survival for the black community. As mentioned earlier, for a time, African-Americans negotiated their relationships with their cultural pasts and tried to preserve their separate cultural traditions as a means of survival in the South. However, during the crucial years of their migration from the rural South to the urban North during the 1930s to 1950s, the greatest losses African-Americans suffered were their loss of roots and connection to their culture. The oral tradition of storytelling and folktales was no longer a source of strength, and another source of strength, their music, which had healed them, was largely appropriated by the white community; consequently, it no longer belonged to them exclusively. For Morrison, as Marilyn Mobley says, "the void is in the lives of those black Americans who seem to have lost the oral tradition of storytelling that once sustained a sense of community and enriched their lives."¹² In her attempt to fill the cultural void she perceives exists in the wake of historical transition, Morrison seeks to reclaim the oral tradition through narrative fiction. Although this tradition and their variants continue to manifest themselves in oral and written literature, the transition from folk to modern culture, posed a threat to the "possible loss

of the orature and cultural history,” and this provides the impetus for her works.¹³

For Morrison, therefore, the development of black fiction is important to counteract the loss of folk traditions, such as the storytelling and music that once constituted the basic elements of African-American culture. Feeling as she does, that another form is now needed to perform those functions that music once did, Morrison suggests that the novel is what African-Americans need now, because it gives people stories that they no longer hear in the family. She writes,

We don't live in places where we can hear those stories any more; parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical mythological archetypal stories that we heard years ago. But new information has got to get out, and there are several ways to do it. One is in the novel.¹⁴

Although today the novel cannot address an exclusive and homogenous racial community, Morrison claims that it can maintain a distinctively racial identity at a generic level. This can be done by salvaging “precisely those elements of folk community whose disappearance occasions the rise of the novel.”¹⁵ In her re-conceptualization of the novel, she thus seeks to incorporate precisely those elements that this traditional genre has excluded or repressed. She considers the African oral tradition a recorder of history and preserver of folk tradition which will create and maintain a group identity. It will also guide social action, encourage

social interaction, and at the same time provide entertainment. The oral arts are equally concerned with preserving and honouring traditional values which can be of relevance to the modern world. Her writing style pays tribute to the non-literary background of black culture and places the novel at the very heart of this process. In doing so, she affirms the positive aspects of black life and culture.

An examination of the formal nature of black literature, in which an oral tradition interacts with a Western literate tradition, also benefits from such an approach. For Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the leading critics in African-American literary criticism, black literature's vernacular tradition distinguishes it from the Western literary tradition. He states that black writers "turn to the vernacular in various formal ways to inform their creation of writing fictions," and in doing so these writers are able to ground their literary practice "outside the Western tradition."¹⁶ He further contends that the African-American literary tradition is to an important extent shaped by a theory of criticism that is already embedded in the black vernacular tradition.¹⁷ In this regard, Morrison makes liberal use of elements of African-American vernacular tradition in her works. Hence, part of the intention of this thesis is to analyze the way her narratives make use of the elements of traditional African-American vernacular as storytelling devices.

In the context of arts, the “vernacular,” which is derived from the Latin *vernaculus* (“native”), describes something “native or peculiar to a particular country.”¹⁸ According to Gates Jr., African-American vernacular tradition comprises of linguistic elements as well as musical genres.¹⁹ In the sphere of language, important parts of the vernacular comprise of the oral traditions of storytelling, the longstanding West African concept of naming or *nommo*, testifying, and Signifying practices.²⁰

The mode of storytelling that Morrison adopts in her fiction has its roots in the West African folkloric tradition in which stories are orally composed and transmitted, and created to be verbally and communally performed. As Obiechina states, “The story itself is a primary form of the oral tradition, primary as a mode of conveying culture, experience, and values and as a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings, and attitudes in oral societies.”²¹ Hence, exploring Morrison’s narrative style for key elements of African modes of storytelling would entail looking at how she deploys these techniques as primary modes of narration that convey all of the above concepts. This aspect of her narrative style is dealt with in Chapter I, in which she goes back to African and African-American myths and folktales to adapt their purposes, structures, and themes to her fiction. At the same time, she also highlights the

implications of inscribing voice for addressing a wide range of issues, particularly those directly related to women's lives.

Another approach that Morrison takes regarding storytelling is to rework folklore into the plot and imagery of her books in order to privilege elements predominant in African/African-American folkloric paradigms. In Chapter II Morrison presents the worldview and spirituality which is pervasive in African-American folklore. An examination of the religious and artistic modes of expression that she employs reveal the nature and logic of ritual acts, motifs and symbols in an African/African-American cultural context.

The focus in Chapter III is on how Morrison tries to keep alive the tradition of African-American music by employing its principles as an integrating feature of her storytelling style. She does this by incorporating and building on African-American oral/musical forms—such as work songs, ballads, spirituals, sermons, the blues, and jazz as storytelling techniques. Hence, the chapter examines the transfer of musical properties to the novel regarding structure and content, which also reveals the power of music to constitute and facilitate communal survival.

A final aspect of Morrison's storytelling style involves the recovery and incorporation of the particular idiom and speech patterns of a community, which was mostly oral. Maintaining a verbal art tradition is

seen as being vital for the survival of African-American culture. Chapter IV deals with the ways in which Morrison tries to weave the characteristically black mode of spoken language in her texts and her attempts to achieve a language that is race-based but not racist, in order to “bear witness” to the experience of her own community through the spoken narratives. Subsequently, this will entail the consideration and explanation of other important aspects of African-American speech acts and central rhetorical practices of black vernacular English particularly, naming, testifying and Signifying that Morrison engages in her novels.

In attempting to write literature that is “irrevocably, indisputably, Black,” Morrison states her intentions to appropriate and incorporate “those recognized and verifiable principles of Black art,” which are,

Antiphony, the group nature of art, its functionality, its improvisational nature, its relationship to audience performance, its critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values...²²

Judging by the characteristics of this tradition, it is clear that literary creation in the black tradition has orality as one of its key elements. Moreover, it is a theory of art that emphasizes the communal participatory experience of oral storytelling that makes narration a shared and collective act. Morrison has often spoken of creating in her narratives “holes and spaces so that the reader can come into it.”²³ This attests her rejection of theories that privilege the author over the reader. The

relationship between the artist and the reader/community that she envisages is an Afrocentric one²⁴ – the discourse based in an African orature whose artists are both participants and representatives of the community. John Callahan in “In the American Grain: Call and Response in the 20th Century Black Literature” (1988) discusses how storytelling in Africa was an open-ended dialogue between storyteller and listeners; during the storytelling process, the audience voiced both assent and dissent which was ritually integrated into the story. This technique, called “call and response,” became a feature of African-American discourse in speech, stories, sermons, songs, blues and jazz. Call and response as a feature of black oral storytelling is of great importance in the structure of Morrison’s fiction. Used as a storytelling device, it endows her work with a dialogic relation between the author, character and the audience. This is in keeping with her avowed aims of identifying with her readers, and of achieving an intimacy with them.

Thus, the basis of Morrison’s fictional mode is African-American folklore: all her works draw on folk myth and vernacular, including folk modes of narration. In her attempt to map these oral forms into literary modes of representation, Morrison has created a body of work influenced by a distinctly black sensibility. As such, the attempt in this study is to identify those elements that highlight the positive aspects of African-

American essentialism. In her exploration of African-American culture, she engages in innovative strategies based on their oral heritage in order to give voice to a marginalized people in print and to bring to her fiction the character of an oral performance rather than a written one. Analyzing how she integrates narrative techniques that reflect her ideological and artistic aims creates a greater appreciation of the indigenous modes of narration. The strategies through which Morrison articulates new alternatives and worldviews present new perspectives of understanding a complex socio-cultural environment.

Understanding the traditions of people and how individual authors have employed them in their works has added a new dimension to the reading of such texts. Judging by the controversial reactions that Toni Morrison's writings have sometimes provoked, it is apparent that this aspect of reading a text has not yet been fully appreciated. It may be pertinent to mention here the ongoing debate among a number of African-American critics that call into question academic notions of canonical literary traditions. These debates centre round the relationship of black writing to Euro-American critical practice and the extent to which African-American writing has been marginalized within the parameters of Euro-American literary conventions. The focus has been on whether black writing "should be approached as a separatist or syncretistic

literature.”²⁵ In such a situation, several critics have pointed out that Morrison has used elements from both the European novel tradition and African-American oral and literary traditions in her works to produce a complex hybrid approach to African-American culture. Morrison’s own critical work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) however, argues that American Africanisms, which are the negative images of African-Americans constructed by white writers, constitute a major technique employed throughout white literary history to define whiteness positively. In order to define themselves positively as “free,” “desirable,” “powerful,” “historical,” “innocent,” “a progressive fulfillment of destiny,” whites construct negative images of blacks as, “enslaved,” “repulsive,” “helpless,” “history-less,” “damned,” “a blind accident of evolution.”²⁶ An application of her theory to black literature would suggest that positive definitions of blackness in black literary history could constitute a counter argument. By defining themselves as free, desirable, powerful, historical, innocent, and a progressive fulfillment of evolution, they would be asserting an identity that clearly revises American Africanisms constructed in white literature. This view has turned Eurocentric criticism on its head and is thus worth further study.



The increasingly popular move to read Morrison's fiction through the lens of postmodernism, post structuralism or other "white" academic theory is, as Barbara Christian in *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*, (1985) states is a tactic that underestimates the crucial importance of Toni Morrison's cultural heritage. Morrison herself would prefer her readers to respond to her texts independently of any literary bias, as she has always attempted to negotiate the "obstacles imposed by the task of freeing her own story from a literary past."²⁷ At the same time, she has often expressed disappointment with critical analyses of her art and has spoken of her wish to have critics understand the traditional background that informs all her works:

Other kinds of structures are imposed on my works, and therefore they are either praised or dismissed on the basis of something that I have no interest in whatsoever, which is writing a novel according to some structure that comes out of a different culture.²⁸

In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," she further cites the "silencing" of the "indigenous qualities" of African-American writing as a "pernicious" consequence of Eurocentric criticism.²⁹ It seems obvious that Morrison is calling for an analysis that complements her art, one that is grounded in her culture, language, worldview, and milieu. Thus, while acknowledging that her critics have drawn valuable insights from and found compelling arguments in feminist, psychoanalytic, post-modern or other readings,

this study intends to address Morrison's critical challenge by using an Afrocentric theoretical perspective to examine the folk modes of narration in her fiction in order to meet the author on her own terms. It is hoped that such an approach would enable us to see how she offers alternative cultural perspectives, which extend greater understanding of ethnic identity and rootedness.

Survey of Existing Literature on the Topic

Toni Morrison's winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 highlighted the great prominence that African-American writing, particularly by black women, has gained in American literature in recent years. At a time when women novelists are gaining more respect in the literary world, Morrison's is an important voice. While it would be beyond the scope of this brief survey to mention all the seminal works in the growing range of Morrison scholarship, a few of the most relevant ones are noted.

One of the earliest critical works on Morrison is Bessie Jones and Audrey Vinson's *The World of Toni Morrison: Explorations in Literary Criticism* (1985), followed by Karen Holloway and Demetrakopoulos' *New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison* (1987), Nellie McKay, ed. *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison* (1988), Harold Bloom, ed. *Modern Critical Views: Toni*

Morrison (1990). Trudier Harris' *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1991), Barbara Rigney's *The Voices of Toni Morrison* (1991), Marilyn Mobley's *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison: The Cultural Function of Narrative* (1991), Karen Carmean's *Toni Morrison's World of Fiction* (1993), Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K.A. Appiah, ed. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (1993), Gay Wilentz' *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora* (1992), and Denise Heinze's *The Dilemma of Double Consciousness: Toni Morrison's Novels* (1993) are a few more of the most seminal works relating to the topic under study. Some of the more recent works are Jan Furman's *Toni Morrison's Fiction* (1996), Harding and Martin's *A World of Difference: An Intercultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels* (1994), Missy Dehn Kubitschek's *Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion* (1998), Linden Peach's *Toni Morrison* (1995) Philip Page's *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels* (1996).

While Trudier Harris has the most complete discussion of the use of folklore in Morrison, it refers only to her first five works. In this provocative study of Morrison's novels, she blends fictive and folkloric approaches to illuminate the depth and complexity of the African - American literary heritage. Harris argues that Morrison "transforms

historical folk materials,” to create “literary folklore”³⁰ and explores Morrison within an African-American cultural context. Karen Carmean brings forth the meaning of Morrison’s complicated themes and writing styles in simple and fluid language. Barbara Rigney analyses Morrison’s mythologizing as a view of history that is not totalizing, while Barbara Christian argues for an Afrocentric approach to her works. Marjorie Pryse and Karla Holloway give accounts of the oral, folk and African sources of conjuring, and Linden Peach unravels notions of self-representation and narrative structure while emphasizing how Morrison’s innovative form is driven by its radical content. Taylor-Guthrie, ed. *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (1994) has interviews from over the course of her career and documents her views about fiction, writing technique and the role of the novelist. Philip Page provides a strong analysis of Morrison’s first six fictional works, and an equally thorough reading of the criticism and theory. He adds new insights, and synthesizes his own ideas with those of others to provide a reading of Morrison’s style, structure, and ideology. Jannette Furman surveys six novels, a short story and a book of criticism to reconstruct the development of Morrison’s creative vision and to assess its influence on contemporary literature. Chronicling Morrison’s growth as a writer, Furman traces the recurrent characters, themes and settings that embody Morrison’s literary philosophy that the artist must engender

and interpret culture. Marilyn Mobley's discussion of Morrison's work draws on scholarship in literary folklore, myth criticism, African-American literary theory and feminist criticism. Her main concern is on the folkloristic patterns in Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*.

These critical studies on Toni Morrison have generally demonstrated her aesthetic and thematic use of black cultural traditions. In addition, there are hundreds of articles, both general and on each of her books, too numerous to mention here. That Morrison's texts encourage theoretically informed criticism in her contemporary is also borne out by recent studies of her works. The variegated critical approaches to her fiction are by no means mutually exclusive of one another, or exhaustive of all possibilities. Rather, such works lay important foundations for reading Morrison with a fuller understanding of her text's cultural distinctiveness. While some work on this has been done, particularly in articles on individual texts, more book-length studies exploring all the nuances of her texts still need to be done.

The attempt in this study is to present Morrison as an African-American woman writer who writes out of racial, gendered, and national specificity. And the focus therefore has been on the elements that distinguish black folklore within the Morrison canon comprising of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar baby*

(1980), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1997). However, *Love* (2003), her latest novel, will remain outside the purview of this study. As can be seen from the survey of existing literature on Morrison, the incorporation of the influences of the oral tradition in her work is not new. Analysing her narrative techniques through these modes, as has been attempted in this study, will perhaps add a new dimension to understanding a complex writer like Toni Morrison, who challenges conventional perceptions of narrative techniques and points of view in order to address contemporary issues that confront African-American people.

Epigraph

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, (1903; rpt. New York: Fawcett Publications, 1967), p.202.

Endnotes and References

¹ Black refers to Americans of African descent. In 1988, Jesse Jackson urged Americans to use the term African American because the term has a historical cultural base. Since then African-American and black have essentially a coequal status. There is still much controversy over which term is more appropriate. Some strongly reject the term African-American in preference for black citing that they have little connection with Africa. Others believe the term black is inaccurate because African-Americans have a variety of skin tones. (McWhorter, John H.

"Why I'm Black, Not African American", Los Angeles Times, September 8, 2004.) Cited after: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American.

Since many African-American writers, including Toni Morrison herself, use both the terms interchangeably, this practice will also be followed in this study. Some people choose to capitalize the "B" in "Black" as a political statement; others think it more political to use the lower case.

- ² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (1903; rpt. 1967). Du Bois' important definition of "double consciousness," "in which an individual is both representative of and immersed in two distinct ways of life," is a focal point for a range of studies of African-American writing, including Denise Heinze, *The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness in Toni Morrison's Novels* (1993) and Michael Awkward, *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision and Afro-American Women's Novels* (1989).
- ³ See in particular Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1984), as well as Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* p75, p.77.
- ⁴ Samuel Olorounto, "Studying African-American Literature in the Global context," *VCCA Journal*, Volume 7.1, (Summer, 1992), p.4.
- ⁵ Yvonne Atkinson and Philip Page, "I been worried sick about you too, Macon": Toni Morrison, the South, and the Oral Tradition," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Vol. XXXI, 2, (Fall 1998), p.98.
- ⁶ According to Amy K. Levin, the word "Africanism" refers to African influences in the cultures of blacks of the New World (p. 5). See Amy K. Levin. *Africanism and Authenticity in African-American Women's Novels*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), p.5.

- ⁷ Cf. Gail Caldwell in Taylor-Guthrie, ed. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, (University Press of Mississippi, 1994) p.243.
- ⁸ Toni Morrison, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," *Contemporary Literature*, 24 (1983), p.423.
- ⁹ Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p.6.
- ¹⁰ Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, (Oxford: University Press, New York, 1987), p. 6.
- ¹¹ Rootedness, p.344.
- ¹² Marilyn Mobley, *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison: The Cultural Function of Narrative*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), p.11.
- ¹³ Gay Wilentz, "Civilizations Underneath: African Heritage and Cultural Discourse in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," *African American Review* 26.1 (1992), p.64.
- ¹⁴ Rootedness, p. 494.
- ¹⁵ Madhu Dubey, "The Politics of Genre in *Beloved*." *Novel, Inc.*, Spring, (1999), p.190.
- ¹⁶ Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxii.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, xix,xx.
- ¹⁸ Cf. Houston Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature. A Vernacular Theory*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984. p.2.

- ¹⁹ Cf. Gates, Jr., and Nellie McKay (eds), *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: Norton 1997), p. 1
- ²⁰ To identify the concept of signifying drawn from African American oral tradition and signal its difference from the standard English usage, Gates employs a capital letter and bracketing the final consonant to distinguish black usage as 'Signifyin(g).' Since this seemingly innocent naming - assigning upper case to black, lower case to white - also implies hierarchy and pecking order, it is itself an example of Signifying. Signifyin(g), according to gates, is an important trope in African-American literature originating in the vernacular traditions to be found in African, Latin-American and Caribbean culture, especially the tales of the Signifyin(g) Monkey.
- ²¹ Emmanuel Obiechina, "Narrative Proverbs in the African Novel." (Special Issue in Memory of Josephat Bekunuru Kubanayanda) *Research in African Literatures* 24.4 (Winter 1993), p.123. 22. Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," *Thought* 59.235 (1984), pp.388-389.
- ²³ Claudia Tate, "Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Black Women Writers at Work*, ed. Claudia Tate, (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1983), 1989, p.125
- ²⁴ Wilentz, p.109.
- ²⁵ Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison*, (St. Martin's Press, 1995), p.102-103.
- ²⁶ Cf. Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.52.
- ²⁷ Jan Stryz, "Inscribing an Origin in Song of Solomon," *Studies in American Fiction*, 19 (1991), p.39.

- ²⁸ McKay, "An interview with Toni Morrison," (1983), p.407.
- ²⁹ Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The African American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 28 (Winter 1989), p.23.
- ³⁰ Cf. Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), p.7.