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Music in Toni Morrison's selected works

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Abstract

In my paper I would like to show African American music in the selected works of Toni Morrison more particularly in Song of Solomon, Jazz and her short story Recitatif. She did not forget the African culture in her works. It does not mean that she rejects the American culture. She shows how the music links to our life and produces the African American self in the losing identity.

Key Words:- Music, Culture, Song, Black, etc.

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African American culture in the United States includes the various cultural traditions of African ethnic groups. It is both part of and distinct from American culture. African American culture is indigenous to the descendants in the U.S. It is rooted in Africa and is an amalgam of chiefly sub-Saharan African and Sahelean cultures. African American culture often developed separately from mainstream American culture because of African Americans' desire to practice their own traditions, as well as the persistence of racial segregation in America. Consequently African American culture has become a significant part of American.

The Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s followed in the wake of the non-violent American Civil Rights Movement. The movement promoted racial pride and ethnic cohesion in contrast to the focus on integration of the Civil Rights Movement, and adopted a more militant posture in the face of racism. Another major aspect of the African American Arts Movement was the infusion of the African aesthetic, a return to a collective cultural sensibility and ethnic pride that was much in evidence during the Harlem Renaissance and in the celebration of Négritude among the artistic and literary circles in the U.S., Caribbean and the African continent nearly four decades earlier: the idea that "black is beautiful." During this time, there was a resurgence of interest in, and an embrace of, elements of African culture within African American culture that had been suppressed or devalued to conform to Eurocentric America.

Music is an art form whose medium is sound and silence. Its common elements are pitch, rhythm dynamics, and the sonic qualities of timbre and texture. African American music is rooted in the

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typically polyrhythmic music of the ethnic groups of Africa. African oral traditions, nurtured in slavery, encouraged the use of music to pass on history, teach lessons, ease suffering, and relay messages. The African pedigree of African American music is evident in some common elements: call and response, syncopation, percussion, improvisation, swung notes, blue notes, the use of falsetto, melisma, and complex multi-part harmony. During slavery, Africans in America blended traditional European hymns with African elements to create spirituals. In the 1800s, as the result of the blackface minstrel show, African American music entered mainstream American society. By the early twentieth century, several musical forms with origins in the African American community had transformed American popular music. Aided by the technological innovations of radio and phonograph records, ragtime, jazz, blues, and swing also became popular overseas, and the 1920s became known as the Jazz Age. These genres became very popular in white audiences and were influences for other genres such as surf. The dozens, an urban African American tradition of using rhyming slang to put down your enemies (or friends) developed through the smart-ass street jive of the early Seventies into a new form of music. In the South Bronx, the half speaking, half singing rhythmic street talk of 'rapping' grew into the hugely successful cultural force known as Hip Hop. Hip Hop would become a multicultural movement. However, it is still important to many African Americans. The African American Cultural Movement of the 1960s and 1970s also fueled the growth of funk and later hip-hop forms such as rap, hip house, new jack swing. African American music has experienced far more widespread acceptance in American popular music in the 21st century than ever before. In addition to continuing to develop newer musical forms, modern artists have also started a rebirth of older genres in the form of genres such as neo soul and modern funk-inspired groups.

Toni Morrison in her childhood often refers the music which was playing at home. Even it is known that her mother sang both jazz and opera. If this is the reason for Morrison understands of music. She has gained many credits like the Libretto for the Black soprano Kathleen Battle and the musical New Orleans about the origins of jazz. Her most engaging relationship to music is translated into the written world. Toni Morrison uses the music structurally and symbolically in her many works. Through the music Morrison gives us the information about the community. She describes the power of music and the function in consideration of her craft. She often mentions music as an ideal art form. In her great essay, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," she discusses the elements of music. She argues that music has been the primary art form of healing for the black people. Morrison sees the novel mirroring the Black music. In her creativity, she attends to the participatory nature of music. Her aim not only makes readers speak to the text but also recognize readers response. She continues the music in, "Living Memory". As an interview with Paul Gilroy. Again and again she said that music has been a source of healing and substance. She concentrates on "intricacy" and "discipline" in the making of the music. She strives to parallel the tension between what information is given in the music.

Symbolic and structural elements of music appear throughout all of the Toni Morrison' works. Music figures are prominent in her three works such as Jazz, Song of Solomon and her only short story "Recitatif". In these works, the idea of music comes at the outset to offer readers to come in contact with the text. The title alludes to a style of musical declamation that hovers between song and ordinary speech; it is used for dialogic and narrative interludes during operas and oratories. The term "Recitatif" also once included the now-obsolete meaning, "the tone or rhythm peculiar to any language." Both of these definitions suggest the story's episodic nature, how each of the

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story's five sections happens in a register that is different from the respective ordinary lives of its two central characters, Roberta and Twyla. The story's vignettes bring together the rhythms of two lives for five, short moments, all of them narrated in Twyla's voice. The story is, then, in several ways, Twyla's "Recitatif." Music sets the tone of the context for several exchanges indicating the way in which each character invests in or responds to the race community. Among the musical styles mentioned in the story seems to carry the most ambiguous cultural associations of all. The vocal style called "Recitatif" is designed for singing the narration of the events in an opera and often precedes an area.

In the *Song of Solomon*, all the elements of the music are the part of the plot. One of the central threads of the story is a song which is transformed all through the novel. In *Song of Solomon*, singing is a means of maintaining a link to a forgotten family history. In a community where most of the past generations were illiterate, songs rather than history books tell the story of the past. Songs record details about Milkman's heritage and cause Milkman to research his family history. Pilate's songs about Sugarman, for instance, encourage Milkman's quest to Virginia. Similarly, the songs Milkman hears about Solomon and Ryna inform him of the mysterious fate of his ancestors, and keep him on the path to self-discovery. Milkman is not the only character who is guided by song. Other members of the Dead family use songs and singing to heal themselves spiritually and emotionally. When Macon Jr. is depressed, for example, he secretly listens to Pilate's songs under her windows. Similarly, after Hagar dies, both Pilate and Reba cope with their grief by singing a mighty rendition of a gospel tune. The healing power of song is a common theme in African-American culture, where it brings people together and allows people to share experiences.

One of Morrison's goals for her fiction is to relay the mood of a musical form. In *Jazz*, she wanted to create a syntax that gives the illusion of Jazz improvising but also to create to portray the reckless, romantic gestures of the form. As the name of the novel implies, music operates both thematically and formally to provide structure to the book. The jazz music of the 1920s situates the narrative in a specific cultural and historical moment, when a black aesthetic style was gaining ground in New Orleans and New York. Both the City and the woods of Virginia are described as having their own music and rhythm and the pace of the narrator's storytelling ranges from upbeat and fast to slow and "bluesy." Music also speaks to the individual characters on a deep level, as when Alice Manfred worries about the sinful powers of the music. However, music can also be restorative, as Felice facilitates the healing process between Joe and Violet by bringing over her records and watching them dance. Music has the stronger presence structurally and symbolically in *Jazz*. It is therefore, fitting that the narrator of the book calls attention to the limitations of being an aural text. In a direct address to the reader, the narrator of the novel *Jazz* speaks about the way a book works and a reader reads.

Finally, it is clear to us that Toni Morrison shows us the African American culture in her various works. She showed the music structurally and sometimes symbolically. Sometimes, music becomes the core of the plot. In the novel, *Song of the Solomon*, music becomes part and parcel to the plot to link to the past ancestor. Morrison sees the novel as another form that can mirror what happens with Black music. In creating her works, she attends to the participatory nature of music, the way it makes the listeners respond through singing and dancing. Her object makes the readers to speak to the text and to recognize reader's response as the part of the text.

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