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THE QUEST FOR SELF AND REALIZING AFRO-AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS IN TONI MARRISON'S NOVEL "SONG OF SOLOMON"

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Abstract

In *Song of Solomon*, one may find that the Quest for cultural Identity and the Quest for one self and Realizing for Afro-American Consciousness by the central character Macon (Milkman) Dead - III. These novel traces and focuses on the turbulent rite of passage in to adulthood, in to Manhood. *Song of Solomon* is a novel of Self Identity. It is the identity of the Afro - American community identity Milkman's ultimate task is to achieve a strong and centred sense of self, a self that accepts responsibility for his past and reaches out in love for others.

Song of Solomon centers on Milkman Dead's unwitting search for identity Milkman appears to be doomed to a life of alienation from himself and others, like his parents, he adheres to excessively rigid, materialistic, Western values and an attendant linear conception of time. During his trip to ancestral home, he discovers his own capacity for emotional expansiveness and learns to perceive the passage of time as a cyclical process. When Milkman Dead incorporates both his familial and personal history into his sense of the present, he repairs his feelings of fragmentation and comprehends for the first time the coherence of his own life. Milkman's father, Macon Dead, Jr is a quintessential self-made man. Orphaned and disinherited in his adolescence, he wheeled and dealt his way in to his position as the richest black man in town. Milkman can therefore brag his father's houses, cars assets and speculations to the

delight of the reverend Mr Cooper and his Danville companions.

Morrison fully conscious of the relationship between the individual and his community. In the beginning of the novel *Song of Solomon*, we find Milkman's low level of consciousness in regard to his people's race and class oppression manifests itself in his nickname. Ironically Macon Dead III acquires it as a result his extended nursing period, for instead of helping him to become more attuned to his mother and her needs this lengthy bonding period proves ineffectual in a society that promotes selfish individualism above love and concern for human kind. As his nickname suggests, he milks women, pilfering their love and giving nothing in return. Even at the age of thirty one, he knows very little about women, an ignorant made evident by his inability to distinguish his sisters from his mother. Nor can he conceived of women as human beings, not even his

mother. "Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own". women, in general, have value only as "need providers" for milkman. Therefore the act of Urinating on Lena becomes an act of symbolic of his pissing on all women. Hagar in particular. Hagar is most exploited. While she genuinely loves Milkman, he loves her solely as a receptacle in which to empty his lust, seldom he treated her as his private honey pot

From Pilate he learns love both free and abundant. Milkman for the first time in his life he remembered being completely happy"

It is to be noted that it is because of Pilate - the pilot-that he is steered in a conscious direction through her acknowledgement of dignity in the proudness of Africanness, despite her lack of material wealth, Milkman gets his first lesson in race and class consciousness. While she looked as poor as everyone said she was, something was missing from her eyes that should have confirmed it.

Like Pilate, Milkman must learn to respect his African self and realize that money does not ensure happiness. Instead of killing the potential savior of his people as does her biblical namesake, Dead Pilate breathes life into Milkman. Pilate is the right person to force him to confront his identity as the living dead who sucks the life force from his people. He learns from her the essence of life

The protagonist's class consciousness is just as weak as his race awareness. He believes his father's capitalist philosophy that to own things is the essence of life. But finally he realizes race and class consciousness and mixes with people. He realizes that an African exploited by capitalism and oppressed racism. He realizes class consciousness.

A thoughtful and less protective appraisal of his personal history motivated by the trials and tribulations that constitute his heroic ordeal and which include his rejection of an injuriously materialistic perspective forces Milkman to comprehend the serious errors of his self-centered ways. Like the traditional mono-mythic Hero he achieves a sense of his identity which is firmly rooted in his relationship to his family and community. For

he has learned in short that he can achieve a sense of membership with his people. Liberated from the shallow and selfish perspectives which had previously characterized him, Milkman has, in short, ended his division from self and tribe and become whole has achieved coming together into a total self.

All of Morrison's novels mirror the characters, language, folklore, mythology of African America. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison nudges cultural memory by examining the importance in the black community of names and naming. Names of places and people are routinely appended. Names have meaning; names tell stories: Ryna's Gulch, Solomon's Leap, not Doctor Street - once called Doctor Street (its official name is Main Avenue) by black in honor of the first black man to practice medicine in the city who lived and died on Doctor Street. When the white city legislators posted notice in business on the street remaining residents of the Avenue's official name, South Side residents deliberately and unceremoniously took up Not Doctor Street, a name which signaled their inventive resistance to nay oppression. Milkman (whose name is one old man's idea of humor) considers the import of black men and women knowing their names.

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