THE FORMATION OF MYTH IN TONI MORRISON'S SONG OF SOLOMON AND SULA

By
Balqees Jameel I. Al_Noubani

Supervisor
Dr. Tawfiq Yousef

This Thesis was Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree in English Language and Literature

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Jordan

January, 2007

This Thesis/Dissertation (The Formation Of Myth In Toni Morrison's Song Of Solomon And Sula) was successfully defended and approved on --------------------------

Examination Committee	Signature

Dr. Tawfiq I. Yousef, Chairman
Prof. of Modern English Literature   ----------------------

Dr.Aida Azouqa, Member
Prof. of Comparative Literature.   ----------------------

Dr. Hani M. Elayyan, Member
Assist. Prof. of the Twentieth American Literature   ----------------------

Dr. Nedal Al-Moussa, Member
Prof. of Comparative Literature   ----------------------
(The Hashemite University)

Dedication

To my parents…. To the ones who have been waiting eagerly for this moment.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Professor Tawfiq Yousef, my supervisor, for his helpful suggestions and insightful comments that enabled me to finish this dissertation. I also thank my committee members, Prof. Nedal Al-Mousa, Prof. Aida Azouqa and Prof. Hani Ismael for their comments and suggestions in all parts of this study during my oral defense. Grateful thanks are due to my friend Laila Abu-Sharkh for providing me with the sources that I needed. I would like to thank Dr. Fahed Salemeh and my colleague Muhmoud Zeidan for their help and comments. Finally I am grateful to my family for their constant support.

Table of Contents

THE FORMATION OF MYTH IN TONI MORRISON'S SONG OF SOLOMON AND SULA

By
Balqees Jameel A. Al_Noubani

Supervisor
Dr. Tawfiq Yousef

Abstract

Myth shows an inclusive, elusive and unstable sense and for this it is accessible to many fields such as psychology, anthropology, philosophy, religion and folkloric studies. Similarly, myth is a significant element in literature. It functions as a rich literary source, which stimulates the imagination of both novelists and poets who either create myths or use mythology in their works.

This study explores Toni Morrison's peculiar formation of myth and mythology in her novels *Song of Solomon* and *Sula.* It provides an analysis of the myths that Morrison re-forms with a reference to critics' views concerning the aspects of myth. It also clarifies the relationship between African-American myths and Classical myths within the context of the novel. Moreover, the current study discusses the role that myth plays in the formation of the elements of novels such as narrative structure, theme, and the formation of characters as well as setting.

This study traces the structure of the mythical quest of the protagonist and its appropriation on two different novels: one is about the male's mythical quest and the other is about the female's mythical quest for their identities in African-American society that is constantly vulnerable to racism. Thus, the application of mythical quest to these two different novels provides room for the discussion of the themes of identity and gender in myth.

In conclusion, Morrison, in *Song of Solomon,* depends on both Classical and African-American mythology to form a literary version of myth about flying. In *Sula*, Morrison aesthetically creates a myth about the setting. In both novels, the myths that Morrison creates affect the success of the heroes' mythical quests. Morrison also uses mythical quest to refer to the theme of identity and the relationship between the individual and his community. Using myths that refer to origin, Morrison is able to create the elements of setting and character of her novels.

Chapter One
Theory of Myth

Toni Morrison is a contemporary African-American novelist and critic who creates myth in her novels. Myth appears in Morrison's first five novels: *The Bluest Eyes* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981) and *Beloved* (1987). This study provides a thorough analysis of Morrison's formation of myth in *Song of Solomon* and *Sula.*

The current study is based on the idea that Morrison relies on two main sources for the content of her novels: myth and history. As Linden Peach puts it, "all her novels are in a sense historical novels or quasi-documentaries that bear historical witness," and that there is "blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality and between fact and fiction in Morrison's novels" (Peach 1998: 2-3). The representation of the two different worlds of history and myth might be responsible for the "blurring" of demarcations between "reality" which is related to historical fact and "fantasy" which is related to imaginative myth.

The study gains its significance from the importance of Toni Morrison and her novels. Morrison is the first African-American novelist to win the Noble Prize for literature in 1993. She also received literary awards for both *Sula* and *Song of Solomon;* she is the recipient of the National Book Award for *Sula* and the National Book Critic's Circle for *Song of Solomon* (Ibid., 2-3). Furthermore, Morrison's literary popularity lies in the plethora of studies written on her novels. As Peach puts it, "Morrison's novels are characterized by diversity and unpredictable nature" (Peach 1998: 1-2). This characteristic of "diversity" is shown clearly in the multiplicity of critical approaches, paradigms and theories used to analyze Morrison's novels. In this respect, Malin LaVon Walther

considers Morrison "a canonical writer" and analyzes "her rapid assimilation into a multi-cultural canon" by saying that

> Critical essays on Toni Morrison have generally placed her within one of four contexts: race, gender, comparative American /Western literature or universal paradigms. Critics of African American literature have demonstrated Morrison's aesthetic and thematic use of Black cultural tradition, feminist critics have focused on how gender shapes Morrison's texts, compartivists have delineated Morrison's debts and revisions of writers such as Faulkner, Joyce, Ellison, Wolf and Shakespeare. (1993: 782)

The characteristics of Morrison's literary work such as "diversity" and inclusiveness apply to her use of myth. In her formation of myth in both *Song of Solomon* and *Sula*, Morrison recreates myths taken from Western and African-American mythology. This hybrid nature of myth makes Morrison's novels peculiar and different from the myth in English and American literature.

This study involves the application of a mythical approach to two different novels written by Morrison: *Song of Solomon* and *Sula* in order to show common points and differences in Morrison's deployment of myth in these novels. Moreover, there is an attempt to show the effect of using myth on the elements of novel such as characters, structure and setting.

This study consists of three chapters and a conclusion; Chapter One makes a brief summary of myth with endeavors to discuss the relationship between myth and literature. Chapter Two involves an analysis of myth in *Song of Solomon*, whereas Chapter Three analyzes myth in *Sula.* The Conclusion clarifies the differences and similarities in the aspects of myth in the two novels to interpret Morrison's use of myth as an integral part of the structure and the content of her two novels.

Song of Solomon is about the story of a Black man's search for his identity through a discovery of his family history. *Song of Solomon* traces the personal history of its protagonist, Macon Dead III, nicknamed Milkman, through his quest for identity. The novel consists of two parts: the first part of the novel traces the growth of Milkman from his birth until he becomes thirty-six in a racist middle-class community, in Michigan, during the first part of the twentieth century. The second part of the novel traces Milkman's individualistic cultural journey to the rural South where his ancestors once lived. Milkman grows up in a death- and money- haunted house with his silent sisters, Magdalene Called Lena and First Corinthians who spend their time making lifeless roses and his strangely passive mother, Ruth Dead, whose marriage lacks sexual intimacy. Following the example of his father who is mainly interested in wealth-accumulation, Milkman shows commitment to materialism. However, during his cultural journey to the South where his family once lived, Milkman comes to understand his place in a cultural and familial community, becomes educated in ancestral knowledge and eventually is able to fly.

The novel opens with the image of attempted flight; Robert Smith, the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent, stands on the roof of Mercy hospital, at the end of Doctor Street, wearing blue silk suit and attempting to fly over Superior Lake which brings about his death. Simultaneously, Milkman's aunt, Pilate, starts singing the Solomon's song: "O Sugarman done fly away /Sugarman done gone/ Sugarman cut across the sky /Sugarman gone home" (Morrison 1995: 11-12). Milkman's daughters, First Corinthians and Magdalen Called Lena drop their basket and start running after the red roses to keep them from getting soiled in the snow, Milkman's mother, Ruth Foster Dead, goes into labor. On the following day, Ruth gives birth to Milkman who becomes the first Black child born in Mercy hospital. When Ruth gives birth of Milkman, people believe that he would be influenced by the circumstances of the flying man.

As the novel proceeds, the readers feel that Milkman shows a constant desire for flying. Unfortunately, discovering at age four that humans cannot fly, young Milkman's imagination becomes dull. As Milkman becomes eleven he has one friend, Guitar, who introduces Milkman to his aunt Pilate with whom Macon Dead III cuts his ties due to her modest appearance. Pilate is a head of a matriarchal family that includes her daughter, Reba, and her granddaughter, Hagar who live in harmony, in a natural place, spending their time singing and making wine from blackberries. Milkman spends a happy time with them and falls in love with his cousin, Hagar, once he sees her. During his manhood, Milkman grows egocentric and becomes bored with everything around him which leads to his alienation. At the end of part one, Milkman feels that he wants to escape his social responsibilities. After he knows about the gold that his father and his aunt found in the cave, Milkman starts a journey to the North looking for it. It is Pilate who inspires him with the idea of traveling; she has a large sack in which she keeps the bones of her dead father. Milkman thought that the sack contains the gold that his father told him about, so he attempts to steal the gold, but after he discovers the bones instead, he decides to fly to the South. He believes that the gold will make him financially independent from his father.

In the second part of the novel, Milkman flies to Danville and then to Shalimar, and his hunt for the gold becomes gradually a hunt for the names of his ancestors and the flying myth of his grandfather Solomon. During his journey, he recollects the names and the personal histories of his ancestors from different storytellers as he goes through many experiences and encounters many people. At the beginning, Black people in the South do not accept Milkman because of his pride. Little by little, Milkman is able to be a member of his ancestors' community and becomes initiated into blackness after he gets rid of his materialistic values, which is symbolized by Milkman's gradual loss of his watch, his car and his money. After he learns the names of his ancestors and realizes the importance of a

name as a sign for identity, Milkman changes his attitudes toward his people; he feels that he missed them and he begins to reconcile with his family and his community members. In the middle of his journey, Milkman goes back to the North where he meets Pilate and tells her about his adventure. He discovers that his cousin Hagar dies as a result of his desertion and ignorance. Then, Milkman accompanies Pilate to Danville to bury the bones of her dead father. At the end of novel, Milkman learns the names of his ancestors, sings the song of his great grandfather, Solomon, and invents a meaning for himself. Eventually, Milkman becomes able to fly.

Like *Song of Solomon*, *Sula* also tells the story of a black female's search for identity. Set in the early 1900s in "the Bottom," the African-American neighborhood of a town called Medallion in Ohio, it traces the development of the characters of two African-American friends, Sula and Nel, from their childhood until Sula's death. *Sula* opens with the description of "The Bottom," which has been bought by Whites, who force the remaining inhabitants out of the neighborhood and level the old buildings to create a golf course. Sula and Nel belong to two different matriarchal families- the Peaces and Wrights. The Peaces consist of one-legged Eva Peace, her daughter Hannah, and Hannah's child, Sula, who live in a large house filled with friends, extended family and assorted boarders. Nel belongs to a family consisting of her mother, Helene Sabat, the daughter of a New Orleans prostitute, who marries Wiley Wright, a man from "the Bottom", and establishes a respectable home there. During their childhood, Sula and Nel remain intimate friends; they share love, sex and dreams together. They also witness the harsh circumstances of racism, unemployment and oppression. One day, on the bank of a river, Sula swings a little boy named Chicken Little around over the river when he accidentally slips from her hands and drowns. Sula and Nel tell no one what happened. During their womanhood, Sula and Nel take different paths: Sula leaves the Bottom to pursue higher education, and Nel marries Jude Greene. Ten years later, Sula returns, quarrels with Eva, and places her in a nursing

home. Shortly thereafter, Nel discovers that Jude and Sula are having an affair and severs ties with her best childhood friend; Jude immediately leaves Nel and moves to Dayton, Ohio.

Sula begins a relationship with a man named Ajax, but he ends the affair when Sula begins acting more like a wife than a lover. A few years later, Sula dies, and Nel briefly visits her. When Sula finally dies she mystically remains conscious: she stands outside her body looking down at it. She realizes that death is painless, something she must tell Nel. The novel now jumps twenty-five years forward, and Nel visits Eva in a nursing home. Although Eva's mind disoriented, she accuses Nel of the involvement in the death of Chicken Little. Nel walks away from the nursing home filled with nostalgic heartache for her longtime friend, Sula, and feels the terrible loss of the long, lost years of her own adulthood.

To analyze the structure of the protagonist's quest in the novels, the study uses the structure of the mythical quest that Joseph Campbell suggests in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The present study also deploys Northrop Frye's structural analysis of myths and archetypes and applies it to the novels to show the success or the limitation of the hero's quest in each one. In addition to Campbell and Frye, the study utilizes other theoretical comments that shed light on the different aspects of myth.

Myth has been encyclopedic enough to motivate the intellectual curiosity of anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers, and literary critics. In spite of the plethora of essays, articles and books on myth and mythology, it remains a rich area for investigation. As one critic observed, the study of myth flourished between 1930 and 1980 (Leitch 1988: 115). This produced what became to be known as the School of Myth Criticism.[1]

One of the crucial issues concerning the critical analysis of myth that has raised much controversy is the definition of myth itself. Throughout its long history, myth shows

an elusive, unstable and ambiguous sense. In this respect, Eric Gould states that "myth is now so encyclopedic a term that means everything or nothing" (1964: 5). In his essay "The Structural Study of Myth," Claude Levi Strauss suggests that thinking about myth means "thinking about a structure of chaos" (Watt 1996: 228). William Righter mentions that "it is difficult to capture the elusive nature of myth" (1975: 7). In everyday speech, people use the word myth to signify its contrast with "reality" (Morford and Lenardon 1991: 7). The issue of the relationship of myth to "reality" and "truth" has been an essential philosophical interest since the time of the Pre-Socratics (Morford and Lenardon 1991: 7).

Many dictionaries provide a general definition of myth. In examining the following definitions, one taken from *Handbook to Literature*, and the other from *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, one notices that there are some general aspects typical to myth:

> Myth: anonymous stories having their roots in the primitive folk beliefs of races and nations and presenting supernatural episodes as a means of interpreting natural events in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view. (Holman 1972: 333)
>
> In general a myth is a story which is not 'true' and which involves (as rule) supernatural beings _ or at any rate supra-human beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. Myth explains how something came to exist. Myth embodies feeling and concept-… Many myths or quasi-myths are primitive explanations of the natural order and cosmic forces. (Cuddon 1999: 526)

Both Holman and Cuddon emphasize some general aspects of myth. The first aspect is the narrative one, an aspect that myth shares with literature. These definitions refer to the narrative aspect of myth by using the word "stories." The second aspect is the source of myth; myth has its roots in "the primitive folk beliefs of races and nations." Myth,

consequently, is a belief which is anarchic and primitive, and each ethnic group or nation has its own mythology. In this respect, Rose suggests that "we use the word mythology to signify the study of certain products of the imagination of a people which take the form of tales" (1964: 1). In other words, every nation has a group of mythic tales. The third aspect reflects the function of myth. According to these definitions, myth has an explanatory function for primitive people, who - in their attempt to explain natural phenomena - compose supernatural stories about existential issues such as "creation," and "cosmic forces," in order to make natural phenomena close to their perception. For Cuddon, myth is a story which is not "true." In fact the meaning of truth in myth arouses controversy among intellectuals. In his essays "Myth, Symbolism and Truth," David Bidney argues that "the truth of myth is purely subjective," and the sort of truth in myth is "psychological" which "expresses how reality appears in terms of our human feeling-qualities" (1955: 384). In the light of these interpretations, myths should not be judged as objective truths that one finds in scientific facts. However, the elements appearing in this definition are unstable. These definitions describe myth as being a "belief" and "primitive." David Bidney, on the other hand, considers myth as modern in the sense that scientific societies develop myths about "experience" which he calls "secular myths." Such "secular myths" replace primitive myths which Bidney considers as "false beliefs" (Gotesky 1952: 523-524). Critics like Wellace Douglas and Percy S. Cohen, suggest that myth, in its popular, conventional and superficial level still exists. In this sense, myth is a synonym for "illusion," "legend" and "false propaganda" (Douglas 1953: 232). Cohen, on the other hand, suggests that myth, in its naïve sense, is a synonym for "erroneous beliefs" (1969: 337). Nevertheless, myth is able to achieve a literary status. The Myth critics contribute to elevating myth to its literary status.

The myth critics based the literary theories of myth on anthropological, philosophical, psychological and folklorist studies (Leitch 1988:115). Leitch explains the causes that have led to the success of this school by staying that:

> The success and popularity during the immediate postwar period in America of myth criticism can be attributed to the narrowness of the reigning formalism and historical scholarship, the impressive growth and attractiveness of early twentieth-century anthropology and psychology and the dreadful spiritual state of modern man and civilization. (Ibid., 115)

Thus, the materialistic atmosphere of the period after the World War II and the excessive interest in scientific facts are among the factors that left the "modern" man stripped of his spirituality. In addition, the sociological, philosophical and psychological studies have become a source for literary critical inspiration for myth criticism. In this respect, it is essential to provide an overview or summary for the theoretical ideas about myth.

The treatment of myth is different from one scholar to another. Some scholars treat myth as a theme, others as a function and there is a third group which treats myth as a structure or a form. Scholars are different from each others in the way they view myth; they consider it as cognitive, anthropological, psychological, ritualistic, magical and narrative (Leitch 1988: 117). In the nineteenth century, there was an intellectual approach to myth and Sir James Frazer is responsible for introducing it. This approach is "a mode of anthropological thinking" which assigns to the primitive man the property of "intellectual curiosity" (Cohen 1996: 383). Most of the followers of this approach treat myth as an explanation. Frazer provides a literal explanation of myth. For example, he uses the mythical story of the tower of Babel to explain the great variety of human languages and cultures (Cohen 1996: 339). In addition to the explanatory function of myth, Frazer attributes magical and ritualistic dimensions to myth. From his book *The Golden Bough*,

_____, (1960). The Archetypes of Literature In: James E. Miller, Jr. **Myth and Method** New York: University of Nebraska Press, 144-162.

Gotesky, Rubin, (1952). The Nature of Myth and Society. **American Anthropologists**, 54 (4), 523-31.

Gould, Eric, (1964). **Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature**. New Jersey: PrincetonUP.

Hassan, Ihab H., (1952). Towards a Method in Myth. **The Journal of American Folklore**, 65 (257), 205-215.

Holman, Hugh C. (1972). **Handbook to Literature**. New York: The Odyssey Press.

Hughes, Langston, and Arna Bontemps (eds.), (1983) **The Book of Negro Folklore**. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company.

Imbrie, Anne E. (1993) "What Shalimar Knew": Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon as a Pastoral Novel. **College English**, 55 (5), 473-90.

Jung, Carl Gustav and C. Kerenyei, (1951). R. F. C. Hull (trans.). **Introduction to a Science of Mythology.** London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul

_____, (1959). R. F. C. Hull (trans.). **The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious.** London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Kirk, Geoffrey Stephen, (1970). **Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and other Cultures**. London: Cambridge UP.

Krumholz, Linda, (1993). Dead Teachers: Rituals of Manhood and Rituals of Reading in Song of Solomon. **Modern Fiction Studies,** 39 (3&4), 554-71.

Lee, Dorothy H. (1982). Song of Solomon: To Ride the Air. **Black American Literature Forum,** 16 (2), 64-70.

Leitch, Vincent B. (1988). **American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties.** New York: Columbia UP.

Leslie, Harris A. (1980). Myth as Structure in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon. **MELUS**, 7 (3), 69-79.

Levine, Lawrence W (1977). **Black Culture and Black Consciousness**. New York: Oxford UP.

Lewis, Vachti Crutcher. (1987). African Tradition in Toni Morrison's Sula. **Phylon,** 48 (1), 91-97**.**

Morford, Mark P.O. and Robert J. Lenardon, (1995). **Classical Mythology**. London: Longman.

Morrison, Toni, (1973). **Sula**. New York: Signet.

_____, (1989). Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature. **Michigan Quarterly Review**, 28: 1-34.

_____, (1995). **Song of Solomon**. Introduced by Reynolds Pric. London: David Campbell.

Montgomery, Maxian Lavon, (1998). A Pilgrimage to the Origins: The Apocalypse as Structure and Theme in Toni Morrison's Sula. **Black American Literature Forum**, 23 (1) 127-37.

Ogunyemi, Okonjo Chikwenye, (1979). Sula: 'A nigger Joke.' **Black American Literature Forum**, 13 (4): 130-33.

Peach, Linden, (1998). **Toni Morrison: Contemporary Critical Essays**. London: Macmillan.

Rank, Otto, (1959). **The Myth of the Birth of the Hero**. Trans. F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe. New York: Robert Brunner.

Righter, William, (1975). **Myth and Literature**. London and Boston: Routledge and Boston.

Rose, H. J. (1964). **A Hanbook of Greek Mythology: Including the Extention to Rome**. London: Menthuen and Co Ltd.

Smith, Evans Lansing, (1998). The Lyrical Nekyia: Metaphors of Poesis in Wellace Stevens. **Journal of Modern Literature**, 21 (2), 201-208.

Spallino,Chiara, (1985). Song of Solomon: An Adventure in Structure. **Callaloo**, (25), 510-24.

Stein, Karen F. (1984). Toni Morrison's Sula: A Black Woman's Epic. **Black American Literature Forum**, 18 (4), 146-50.

The New English Bible, (1970): Oxford UP and Cambridge UP.

Tyson, Lois, (1999). **Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide**. New York and London: Garland Publishing.

Walters, Windy W., (1997) 'One of Dese Mornings, Bright and Fair/, Take My Wings and Cleave De Air': The Legend of the Flying Africans and Diasporic Consciousness. **MELUS**, 22 (3), 3-29.

Walther, Malin LaVon, (1993). "And All of the Interests are Vested": Cannon Building in Recent Modern Criticism. **Modern Fiction Studies**, 39 (3&4), 782-93.

Watt, Ian, (1996). **Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe**. London: Cambridge UP.

Wilentz, Gay, (1989-1990). If you Surrender to the Air: Folk Legends in Flight and Resistance in African American Literature. **MELUS,** 16 (1), 21-32.

Song of solomon: free literature summary. Overall analysis. Morrison chooses such a character for her protagonist in order to examine the group of people who are at the forefront of the new generation of African Americans. She doesn't draw Milkman as an entirely negative character, but one who needs some correction. She traces his flaws back to his parents' damaged psyches and she pushes him through change and transcendence by taking him back to his ancestors who teach him the lessons of love, strength, and community. Milkman undergoes a wonderful transition as he learns of his ancestors. Toni Morrison's third novel, Song of Solomon, established her as a major American writer. The story of a Black man's search for his identity through a discovery of his family history, it became a bestseller and drew praise from readers and critics when it was published in 1977. Morrison fictionalizes this folktale through the character of Solomon, the great-grandfather of the story's protagonist, Milkman Dead. Through his discovery of the story of Solomon and his ability to fly, Milkman learns to take pride in his ancestry and to value his connections to family and community. Also that year, Morrison began work on Sula, her second novel, and took a job as an editor at Random House, where she worked with some of the prominent Black authors of the 1970s. Clark, "Flying Black: Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Sula, and Song of Solomon" Minority Voices 4 (1980): 51–63Google Scholar. Tidey, "Limping or Flying? Psychoanalysis, Afrocentrism, and Song of Solomon," College English 63 (2000): 48–70.CrossRefGoogle Scholar. 4. In an interview with Kathy Neustadt, Morrison said that Pilate's song in Song of Solomon is similar to a song sung by members of her family. "I don't know all the lyrics but it starts with a line like 'Green, the only song of Solomon,' and then some words I don't understand, but it is a genealogy. I made up the lyrics in the Song o... Acclaim for Toni Morrison's. Copyright. Daddy. The fathers may soar. And the children may know their names. Foreword. Both the quotation and the song of the title fairly shout that different understanding. To praise a woman whose attention was focused solely on family and domestic responsibilities, Milkman summons a conundrum: that without ever leaving the ground she could fly. My father laughed. Part I. Chapter 1. The North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o'clock. Two days before the event was to take place he tacked a note on the door of his little yellow house Toni Morrison's new version of the Flying African in Song of Solomon sharply contrasts with the traditional folktale. Whereas "flight" in Lester's narration has a "communally beneficial"[9] character, its nature in Song of Solomon is very individualistic. In the updated folktale Solomon escapes from slavery by flying away. In Song of Solomon the act of flying represents a crucial aspect, which accompanies the protagonist Milkman Dead throughout his life. Occurring at the beginning and at the end of the novel, this aspect forms a kind of framework, which holds together the narration. The novel begins on the day before Milkman's birth with the "abortive attempt"[14] at flight of the insurance agent Robert Smith, who leaps from the roof of the Mercy hospital.