

ABSTRACT

ARTISTRY AS REDEMPTIVE FORCE IN TONI MORRISON: Re-Cognition of the African-American Aesthetic

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This study critically analyses Morrison's contribution to the process of rescuing the black subject from denigration and narrative erasure. Her novels explore and articulate an African-American aesthetic in which language, orality, rhythm, folklore and spirit-work are garnered into a powerful force that evolves from The Bluest Eye to Jazz.

Morrison shapes her art through exposition in narrative that is restorative of elements of black culture as well as cathartic for characters who grieve for a black ancestor. These characters plod from "catharsis", which addresses the devastation perpetuated on oppressed people in a racist society, to "revelation", which incorporates both psychological competence and cultural awareness that make individuation possible. By utilising the intensity of 'feeling form' as an emotional impetus in characters who are susceptible to psychological vulnerability, she re-ignites the powerful musicality and orality of jazz as an antidote for the poisonous state of racism.

Fashioning a narrative form in which variations on themes of race, history, freedom and insanity are re-viewed and re-visioned, she devises adverse conditions for subversive action. This technique, best illustrated in her unspeakable acts, functions as a methodological necessity, creating eclectic affinities and producing powerful tensions in her work. The result is fragmentation, which shatters the norms but reconfigures a self-reflexive prose that privileges black artforms.

While forging 're-cognition' as a thoughtful 'linguaging' process, Morrison discloses 'other' ways of being-in-the-world. Historical knowledge and psychological movement across time, as meaning-creation devices, contribute to her continuous transformation for "arting" black condition. Consequently, the conventional notion of black aesthetic, as a vulgar tenancy, derived from slavery in which almost all connections to a black ancestor were erased or ignored, is abnegated.

Keywords: Toni Morrison; Redemptive Artistry; African-American Aesthetic