

ABSTRACT

African-American Female Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's Fiction

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Despite various theoretical approaches, dominant trends among Toni Morrison critics include valorisation of community at the expense of individuality and suggestion of progressive improvement according to the publication dates of the novels. This thesis departs from such trends by drawing attention to the complications of the individual's interaction with community, in the construction of subjectivity (or a sense of self). In recognition of history's impact on African-American female subjectivity, the study offers a chronological arrangement, reading the ways in which Sethe, Violet, Sula, Christine and Pecola (from the novels Beloved, Jazz, Sula, Love and The Bluest Eye respectively) are shaped as individuals by an ethnic community with a history spanning from slavery to "the Black Consciousness Movement." The work of scholars who have explored the concept of subjectivity such as Jacques Lacan, W. E. B. Du Bois, Homi K. Bhabha, Hortense Spillers, Claudia Tate and Louis Althusser, constitutes the theoretical frame of this research. To this extent, the findings from this thesis involve acknowledgement of African-American female subjectivity as contextualised by multiplicity, history, instability, indeterminacy and inevitable complexity. Ultimately, this study's significance hinges on its affirmation of a revisionist psychoanalytic model as a useful methodology for studies of African-American literature.

Keywords: African-American females; psychoanalysis; subjectivity; history; community; multiplicity.