

Song of solomon: flight

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In Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*, she produced this novel where racial issues and discrimination were at its highest rate. Morrison undoubtedly connects the flying African motif to commit suicide in this contemporary setting. She also vitalizes this flying African motif with Milkman and his journey to discover himself. The book tells the story of Milkman Dead and his confusion with his identity but also his obsession with flying.

Throughout the book Milkman faced many examples of flight that comes from Mr. Smith and his attempt of jumping off the roof leaving his troubles behind, also he sees Pilate, who Milkman sees as the best example of flight because she has managed to liberate herself of subjugation and not leave anyone behind in troubles and lastly, himself, who is confused about his identity, but also leaving his troubles behind when he is involved in these, he always tries to escape from them by flying away. This “flight” can also be compared to what Pilate thinks that flight means in her life.

In the beginning of the book, it starts with the insurance man, Mr. Smith, preparing himself to jump off the roof of Mercy Hospital with his blue silk wings, he says, “I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all” (Morrison 3), Mr. Smith is trying to commit suicide because as Guitar says later on, “And if it ever gets too much, like it was for Robert Smith, we do that rather than crack and tell somebody” (Morrison 158), what Guitar means by “that” is suicide, once that Robert Smith could not handle more murders over him, and he was so overwhelmed by it, he decided to take his own life away by his own decision.

He can also be doing this as a form of protesting against the social issues because he jumped off from a racist hospital(Mercy Hospital), which does not let black people get attention. By flying off the roof of Mercy Hospital, Mr. Smith shows his own perception of what flight means to him, he committing suicide is a way of leaving all his problems behind and being free by taking his own decisions, which he was not able to do before because the “ Seven Days” would control everything on his life.

The next character that is also included in the theme of flight and has a very important role on Milkman's life is Pilate, his aunt, because she seemed so interested on Milkman since he was born, later she came to visit Macon II and Ruth and see Milkman, but because Macon II criticized her for selling wine she left and never came back. Pilate lives in a very bad-looking house what seems to be abandoned because she cares more about his family than material things. As she said “ She gave up, apparently, all interest in table manners or hygiene, but acquired a deep concern for and about human relationships”(Morrison 149).

Driven by an unselfish desire to care for others, Pilate gives up her wandering lifestyle to provide a stable home for her granddaughter, Hagar, and to watch over Ruth, her sister-in-law, who is " dying of lovelessness."(Morrison 151). Pilate wanders for twenty years and experiences a series of adventures that shape her character and free her to make hard choices concerning her role in society. From the moment she emerges from her mother's womb, she creates herself, improving her situation by working her way up from washerwoman to entrepreneur. Unlike

her brother, Macon, who inherited his wealth from Ruth, Pilate creates her own way.

Pilate herself is endowed with supernatural powers, she completes her journey without the help of others' magic or divine intervention. She is a courageous woman who assumes full responsibility for her life and meets life head on, but because she is neither white and male nor young and beautiful, her accomplishments are discounted and her wisdom discredited, even by the black community. Pilate refuses to be defined by the limiting perceptions of others and insists on creating her own reality. She delivers Milkman from his spiritually dead existence. By creating herself, Pilate has crafted her own metaphorical wings that as Milkman sees enable her to "fly" while remaining in the ground.

Lastly, Morrison uses Milkman's idea of flight as a journey to find his real identity but she also displays the character of Milkman, who is always trying to fly away from his problems. Milkman has always been obsessed with flying until he discovers "at four, the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier- that only birds and airplanes could fly- he lost all interest in himself." (Morrison 9), Milkman's fascination with flying never truly dies.

The discoveries of the young Milkman that he would "have to live without that single gift saddened him and left his imagination so bereft that he appeared dull" (Morrison 9), like this the beginning of Milkman life is marked by the attempt of fly by Robert Smith, and this fascination follows Milkman throughout the book, and this is established as a metaphor for his identity that he seeks. He is always interested in things that can fly as one time

Guitar and Milkman saw a peacock, in this instance Milkman realizes his fascination with anything that could fly, then Milkman noticed something and says, ““ How come it can't fly no better than a chicken?””, to what Guitar respond ““ Too much tail. All that jewelry weighs you down. Like vanity.

Can't nobody fly all with all that shit. Wanna flight, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down’”, (Morrison 179), this led Milkman to a deep reflection about himself but with what Guitar just said he realizes that not all in life is own things, if he wants to fly, he has to leave all those things behind because they are holding him back from where his real identity can be found. Milkman also is afraid of being in trouble because when Guitar face him with a question that challenges him or would affect him, Milkman answer is “ Buy a plane ticket”(Morrison 104), he now demonstrates that he does not want to get into trouble and he sees flight as the only way to escape from them. Both Milkman situations, adolescent and adult, show his need for personal growth, integration and transformation.

The theme of flight couldn't be more different between these three characters: Mr. Smith, Milkman and Pilate. Starting off with Mr. Smith who by committing suicide he flies away from his responsibilities and crimes that he has committed in life. What flight means to Mr. smith is freedom but it's completely different to what Pilate shows in her life, they can't be compared because Pilate rather than flying and leaving his problems behind as Mr. Smith, she decided to face them with courage and affront them with her head on, which makes them incomparable because they are two different types of people and have two different types of approaching their lives.

For Milkman, this is also a different kind of history, Milkman at the beginning did the same as Mr. Smith, always trying to leave his problems and family behind, but when Milkman realizes that Pilate is a-typical person to him, he sees how she dies in front of him and he sees how can she flights “ without ever leaving the ground”(Morrison 336), but for Milkman this show him a different understanding of what flight means, as Pilate cares about his family Milkman also does the same looking for his background story, they in a sense are alike but Milkman had to go through a lot of things before he sees this clearly, he then understands that flight means be free but without leaving anyone behind and live your life helping and caring about your family, which is ultimately the most important thing in one's life.

As a conclusion, the different perspectives of these characters shows that “ flight” in this novel, can have two meanings, the first one that people can escape from their problems by flying and the second one that people can face their problems and encourage themselves take responsibility for their actions in their lives. Throughout the book Milkman faced many examples of flight that comes from Pilate and his example of courage, Mr. Smith and his cowardness by leaving his troubles behind and Milkman an his discover of identity and transformation of life.