SUMMING UP...

Although literary history has always proved that the stories of a marginalized group can never be narrated with gusto by its writers, Toni Morrison makes visible what was shunned from Light within African American Culture. The canonical gatekeepers of Literature have stepped aside so that the truth about African American literature can break free of the cultural silencing through her. Such a magnificent breakthrough was possible for Morrison for a number of reasons. Her work as novelist, editor and critic has always been received enthusiastically by critics of African American Literature. Besides, Morrison’s career in publishing is of seminal importance in black American intellectual history. In her position as senior editor at Random House, Morrison facilitated the careers of an array of black American intellectuals. She made possible the publication of important fiction and nonfiction – including critical analysis, history, poetry and biography – by numerous black writers. Her work at Random House, which by the end of the twentieth century included a distinguished list of more than twenty authors and thirty five texts, paved the way for the emergence
of some of the most important work by black American authors of today. She edited, among other projects, Leon Forrest’s *There is a Tree More Ancient than Eden* (1973), the Bloedworth Orphans (1977) and *Two Wings to Veil My Face* (1983), George Jackson’s *Blood in My Eye* (1972), Ivan Van Sertima’s *They Came Before Columbus* (1976), the fiction and essays of Toni Cade Bambara – including Bambara’s posthumous novel, *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (1999), Gayl Jones’s first three novels, June Jordan’s *Things that I Do in the Dark* (1977), Chinweizu’s *The West and the Rest of Us* (1975) and Angela Davis’ *An Autobiography* (1974) and *Women, Race and Class* (1981). Morrison’s work as an author and critic has helped inspire the career of Gloria Naylor. Another factor that gives her international recognition is her active participation in the critical discourse of the time. Her novels have created space for black and feminist texts. Also, because she helped to bring in the work of younger Afro-American women authors, the predominant male makeup of the Afro-American literary canon has been changed forever by Morrison. Most important, however, she produced some of the most artistically, historically and politically important work of the twentieth century.

The politics of her writing, the message that Morrison wants to reach her readers, is the strength of the way of life lived by the blacks in an earlier time. Her
sense of nostalgia forces her to record the triumphs and complexities of that life. She brings into focus the present conflict between urban, material values of the larger contemporary culture and the values of the traditional black village communities of the past. She believes that literature can provide a means of survival to contemporary generation of blacks who are severed from the strong ties of their community:

“There has to be a mode to do what the music did for blacks what we used to be able to do with each other in private and in that civilization that existed underneath the white civilization. I think this accounts for the address of my books. My work bears witness and suggests who the outlaws were, who survived under that circumstance and why, what was legal in the community as opposed to what was legal outside of it. All that is in the fabric of the story in order to do what the music used to do. The music kept us alive – in touch with our spirit – but it’s not enough anymore”. (New Republic 21 March (1981) 26)

Morrison feels strongly that it is her abiding mission to restore and to reveal the magical quality of life, which she believes to be utopian in nature. Through her fiction she tries to prove that during an early time when blacks were openly
oppressed, their close-knit ties made them more cohesive and strong as a group. Morrison recalls the idealistic practices of the neighbourhood and community with conviction and clarity because she herself was a child of the middle generation of African Americans, a generation who was born and raised during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s in communities where a core black culture was lived, nurtured and passed on as an ethical code in everyday life.

In representing the middle generation of African Americans, Morrison also internalizes a fear that the distinctive cultural life she once knew, with its pain, its joy, its strength, its distinctive ways, is not going to be passed on to the next generation. She tells Michael Bandler:

“May be I’m a little too romantic about what has been possible for blacks like myself-who grew up in enormous economic duress yet never were degraded by it. But I have to write about it so that young blacks who never were told about the resiliency of those who preceded them can understand that courage and heroism.” (American Women Sept – Oct (1979) 28).

Thus the utopian account of her past, includes not just the sharing mentality, the age-old beliefs and communal practices, but the flavor, the values, the spirit, the
sustaining intangibles of the life she remembers as she was growing up in the 1930’s and 1940’s with proud, resourceful parents committed to living their way of life on their own terms.

Utopia as ideology is a totality. But when Morrison records Afro-American history in a fictionalized form, Truth and Fidelity are her guiding mottos. At the juncture, it will be apt if one looks at utopia as a synthesis. Utopia therefore is always a reconciling synthesis. When its frontiers are stretched, one is bound to encounter dystopian elements outlining its image. This brings in Morrison’s equally powerful portrayal of the unpleasantness accompanying the strangest protests of blacks against racism and sexism. The project thus attempted to bring in the full scope of the dystopian world of Afro-American who migrated from the South to the North in order to escape overt racial discrimination. Just like the utopia mentioned by her, this dystopia too is boundless space; that is, their boundaries seem to merge with each other. Consequently only woman households and only-black towns, that defy white’s and middle-class blacks’ definitions of ‘acceptable’ black behaviour emerge. Even Harlem, which had a utopian aura about it as it offered decent housing, employment and social opportunities for black migrants, is pictured as a dystopia by her in the wake of increased suppression of black rights and horrific racial violence. The entire
chapter thus is the redefining of the parameters of the black community itself. This unpleasant redefining is not a natural development, the black community will be forced to resort to such a revolutionary stand if there is no real sympathy for the social plight of Afro-Americans—so the dystopia seems to warn the reader.

If Magic Realism was a boon to Morrison in the handling of her idealistic and radical presentation of Afro-American history, Fantasy helps her to reach the apex of her presentation. The Grotesque and the uncanny thus become powerful ways to reveal personal or social tensions engendered by slavery and racism. Similarly Morrisons’s rendering of folk culture reveals subtle and overt ironic stances toward slavery and other forms of racism. Folksong, Music and the use of dreams too provide insights into American historical events and period lifestyles that only they can provide. By subverting the Real, Morrison again has given her reader ironic revelations of black life circumscribed by Racism and Sexism. Therefore, the foregoing analysis establishes that Fantasy grants Morrison an indelible impact upon American Literature which a linear account of history can never achieve.

How multilevel narratives can create a wholesome picture is the also one of the concerns of the fifth chapter. Multiple complications of interwoven identities
of the narratorial voice takes into account different versions of the past in each novel. The dialogic tendencies of memory and its imaginative capacity to construct and reconstruct the significance of the past is certainly Morrison's forte. Every novel therefore meanders, circles back and moves spirally in her mode of Narration. Never does she make any novel a parade of mythic suffering of blacks. This is achieved by her when she captures the rhythm of black expression, enlivening it with all its attendant endearing mannerisms.

The effort to interpret Morrison within an intellectual context has often been accompanied by an effort to deracialize her. No black writer, male or female, has become as accepted a part of the American literary canon as Morrison. Right from the beginning of the project till the very end, the effort to understand Morrison within the literary context of Magic Realism thus has always stressed her Afro-American identity. Morrison believes, in fact, that black women have the ability to understand the weaknesses, the complexities and the potential of humanity. Being a black woman, she says, is a bonus — it enlarges the way she views the world. Though racist and sexist society can make life problematic for Afro-Americans, Morrison bravely smiles on. After all, she has mastery over the technique of Magic Realism which itself can make daily life take on an eerie form.