CHAPTER V

DOVE’S INDIVIDUALITY AS A CULTURAL MULATTO

IN FICTION, SHORT FICTION AND DRAMA.

Not that I’d want to forget being Black, but I would love to walk through life without the anxiety of being prejudiced and pigeonholed on the basis of my race. (Dove interview with Taleb Khyar 79)

The post colonial era which witnessed dramatic changes in the racial and cultural mix led to the coining of terms like ‘creolization’ and ‘hybridity’ while referring to the ‘diaspora.’ Dove has been identified as a “cultural mulatto,” by critics like Pereira and Ellis. Dove has a double identity: an African American and a “cultural mulatto.” Dove has made use of the double identity as her strength to establish her determination to assert her worthiness and uniqueness and to never meekly remain in acquiescence as a conformist. Dove has proved herself as a “cultural mulatto,” another new term to be added to postcolonialism to focus on the hybrid quality of the cultural mulatto figures, a positive perception which emerged out of both cultures, and traditions in Through the Ivory Gate, The Darker Face of the Earth, and The Fifth Sunday.

The term “cultural mulatto” was first used by Trey Ellis in his article “The New Black Aesthetic.” He identifies Rita Dove as “the New Black Aesthetic” artist and “a cultural mulatto”, who is gifted with experiences of two cultures and races. She has emerged “as a New Black Aesthetic writer with a range and mix of cultural experiences.” A cultural mulatto is “a genetic mulatto” of a “black person of mixed parents who can often get along fine with his white grandparents,” and a cultural mulatto is “educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures, can also navigate easily in the white world. And it is by and large this rapidly growing group of cultural
mulattoes that fuels the NBA” (Ellis 235). Before Ellis could coin the term “the New Black Aesthetic” Dove has instinctively used this cultural mulatto identity in her literary outputs to express her optimistic views of her African American characters. According to Ellis, “the New Black Aesthetic” artists are trans-cultural in their approach and they have “changed, crossed, and flouted existing genres according to their own eclectic inspirations” (Ellis 234).

In the second place “a telltale sign of the work of the NBA [New Black Aesthetic] is the parodying of the black nationalist movement” (Ellis 236), and “the new, unflinching way NBA artists are looking at black culture is largely responsible for their popularity” (Ellis 237) and finally Ellis calls them “cultural mulatto.”

Just as a genetic mulatto is a black person of mixed parents who can often get along fine with his white grandparents, a cultural mulatto, educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures, can also navigate easily in the white world. And it is by and large this rapidly growing crop of cultural mulattoes that fuels the NBA. We no longer need to deny or suppress any part of our complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural baggage to please either white people or black. (Ellis 235)

The idea of a cultural mulatto black artist is born out of the “interracial cultural miscegenation” in the mixed American scenario. In the beginning the term cultural mulatto “is a misnomer” and “reinforces the pejorative nineteenth century association of the first-generation biologically half-black and half-white persons with the sterility of mules and the trope of tragic mulattoes who agonize over being neither white nor black” (Bell 318).

After the postcolonial invasion, there is a shift in seeing things with a positive outlook. Dove has proved Trey Ellis’s notion of “cultural mulatto” as a hybrid generation with not only “double identity,” but also with double culture, double tradition, double talents who can...
“navigate easily in the white world.” Dove’s double identity is not a disgrace but a source of energy to bring a potential change in her works as a cosmopolitan writer. Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held in “Kant’s Cosmopolitanism” say that cosmopolitanism “advocates the liberal moral features of individualism, egalitarianism, and universalism beyond the borders of the state while also insisting that these moral features should act as key regulative principles in reforming global institutional structures” (2). Dove continues as an individual with her African American consciousness in her novel. The cultural mulatto characters have been created by Dove as independent, self-regulating, and self-sufficient in their behavior with the cosmopolitan outlook.

This chapter highlights how Dove’s mulatto characters (i) “get along fine with” their white neighbours, (ii) are “educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures and navigate easily in the white world,” and (iii) show their identity as cultural mulattos with individualism and universalism. Dove has ultimately changed the stereotyped term “tragic mulatto” of nineteenth century African American literature to an optimistic hybrid potential in her fiction, play, and in her short fiction. She has purposefully given a creative and autonomous space for the mulatto identity moving beyond the unfavourable representations of the earlier African American works.

This term “mulatto” was used with a tragic vision by other African American writers during the Harlem Renaissance and after. During the African American nadir of 1877–1920, when the political backlash against black Americans was at its height, the tragic mulatto theme developed fully into a set of conventions whose central plot element concerned mixed-race, near-white heroes or heroines who discovered, to their horror, that they were not completely white as they had previously thought but instead had at least a drop of black blood. This revelation led either to acceptance or denial of a mixed-race self.
William Wells Brown’s novel *Clotel* marked the beginning of the “tragic mulatto” theme in African American fiction. The novel also denoted the beginning of the use by African American fiction writers of Central American political events to dramatize the underlying hypocrisy of democratic principles in the face of African American slavery. Brown developed the tragic mulatto theme most fully in depicting the characters of Ellen and Jane: Ellen, depicted as mixed-race and not in control of her future, takes poison to avoid sexual compromise, and Jane dies of a broken heart. From Brown, Hughes also developed this idea of a mulatto. Hughes’s *Mulatto: A Play of the Deep South*, (1963) ‘a racial melodrama’ was his first full-length play. It describes the conflict between a mulatto son and his white father. Like Robert, some of the children may share the characteristics of their white fathers. In Norwood, the white father, the qualities of stubbornness and pride (white features) ultimately led to his own death at the hands of his son, after Norwood refuses to accept him as his son. Hughes’s play illuminates the complex workings and effects of a culture infected by racism.

Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) portrayed the mulatto figure Janie Starks who struggled for her acceptance in her community. She never had a firm grasp of her identity, did not even know her black colour until she saw her picture one day. She was not aware of her family history. She never knew her father. But Dove’s cultural mulatto Virginia King, the blues heroine of *Through the Ivory Gate*, has her identity, (as a puppeteer) knows her family history, (“We moved to Arizona when I was in fourth grade,” “we had moved from Pittsburgh to Akron when I was twelve” (*IG* 18)) knows her likes and dislikes, (“Virginia had liked the neatness of the tonette, its modest musical range and how it fit into her school desk on the right side” (*IG* 22) and she has determination to choose her own job. The mulattos need not be biologically mixed but when there is a quest for authenticity in her assimilated culture, the
mulatto gets her unique identity. Virginia regains her mulatto identity and keeps a unique place in her journey towards individuality as an African American woman. Dove has made the heroine the protagonist of the novel as if to establish the fact that a heroine could well be the main character in a work of art and not necessarily a hero.

Way back in the fifties Lorainne Hansberry in the play *Raisin in the Sun* created Beneatha younger a representative of the liberated young black girl, who believes in getting educated for she believes that education is her birth right. Even though her family is clearly poor, Beneatha has no reservations about satisfying her ego. She decides to try her hand at a variety of hobbies much beyond their means like horseback riding, getting a camera for trying out photography, trying out acting, and taking guitar lessons. If Beneatha is one type of a liberated woman we find James Alan McPherson creating Virginia Valentine as a “classic kind of a negro.”

Born and reared in a country town outside Knoxville, Tennessee, Virginia, enjoyed in the early 1960s, a degree of freedom that American blacks had not known before. She traveled the world, first as a member of the Peace Corps and later on her own. She travels through India, Kenya, Egypt, and Israel. Returning to the United States at age twenty-two, she continued to travel through the North. She made friends, finding many people like her, but after a while racial divisions made it difficult for people in her social crowd to really understand each other. Virginia was a happy mixture of the white, black and Native American races. Perhaps McPherson for the first time conceives of a cultural mulatto. And Dove stretches her portrayal to reflect the cultural mulattoes of her times and we find her works with such characters who are not merely genetic or biological mulattoes but who have the mixture of cultures in them.
This chapter shows how Dove’s cultural mulatto characters such as Virginia King in *Through the Ivory Gate*, Augustus Newcastle in *The Darker Face of the Earth*, and the Spray Paint King in *The Fifth Sunday* navigate easily in the white world and share artistic values and commitments. All these three characters are brought forth to announce Dove’s mainstream integration, cultural amalgamation, and African American nationalism. Dove’s works emerge out of her experiences in America, Germany, and the United Kingdom with her educational and social backgrounds. Dove’s multidimensional creation of cultural mulatto characters first appeared in *Through the Ivory Gate*.

Dove creates a world of characters with “individualism, egalitarianism, and universalism” beyond the borders of the state who breathe freedom with artistic endowment and specific cultural dominance. According to Dove, a person need not be a cultural mulatto by birth to accept these norms, but if the person accepts any culture and lives with freedom of expression, then he/she is also in the world not only of cultural mulattos, but also has a cosmopolitan outlook. Dove’s fiction, play, and short fiction are standing invitations to explore her world of individualism, selfhood and an extraordinary uniqueness. We can explore life, joy, love, death, and loss as natural phenomena.

According to Graham, the African American novel had become “a complex discursive field where inventive language, innovative structure, and historical meaning came together in texts with varying degrees of literacy and literalness for a wide range of readers” (qtd in AAL 544) in the 1970s. Dove’s unique contribution is *Through the Ivory Gate*, a novel with a single linear plot line with multiple interwoven stories. Her novel is filled with flash back memories, exploring the impact of past, present and future; character revelation, growth, and the challenges put forth before the protagonist to shape the individual lives and divisions; chronological
recounting the writer’s experience to reclaim history; and rich description of places and setting, neighborhood to give her emotional outlook beautifully.

Dove seems to go back in time to view her home as a child from a newly shifting and surreal location. The speakers in Dove’s poems are not usually at ease with their surroundings, and they tend to look upon scenes of home as seen through a distant and dispassionate eye. She re-visits her home to possess it in Through the Ivory Gate. She delves deep into her African American identity as a mulatto to find her belongingness in her soil. This is a kind of spiritual journey into her own life as an artist as well as an African American mulatto. This spiritual journey is confronted with many obstructions and hindrances yet her heroine is successful at the end. There is also a physical journey to match her spiritual venture. Virginia, a gifted musician, devoted teacher, artist, and puppeteer is the central character of this novel. She is a cultural mulatto personality, represents Dove. This novel is a semi autobiography of Dove’s African American amalgamated self in America. Virginia’s physical and external journey from Akron, Ohio, to Phoenix, Madison, and nostalgia over her hometown Akron, and her journey to New York sum up the entire novel. Her journey becomes internal when she goes back to her childhood days. Again she comes to her present situation to live the moment. She is naturally oscillating between her external and internal journey in her life.

In Through the Ivory Gate (1992) Dove grows up in Middle America and travels through the ups and downs of life, insight of love, benignity, realities of marginalization, and exposure to jubilant challenges with the arts. The novel gets a full form in 1979 with Dove’s trip to Dublin, Ireland. Dove develops Virginia as a supreme heroine and demonstrates the way cultural mulattos live in socioeconomic levels of the black community. As the novel progresses, the heroine exhibits her self-restorative act of racial resistance, proving positively her growing
selfhood and her independent nature. Virginia’s choice of her musical instrument cello, her living in Akron, and her revelation about the musical phrasing with Bach Suites and the positive sides of the life of the heroine are completely connected with Dove. Virginia recollects these memories working in an elementary school in her home town of Akron, Ohio.

Virginia, an insightful and highly self-examining young woman, a student of Bach and Brecht, a good scholar and a Cellist, graduated with an acting degree as well as a strong commitment to playing the cello. Virginia worked as a stenographer, later she joined the recently disbanded theater group “Puppets and People” and a bohemian commune close to her alma mater. Meanwhile, she accepted a position as artist-in-residence at the Booker T. Washington Elementary school in Akron, Ohio, where she grew up until her family’s sudden and hasty move to Phoenix. It was her new work with school children that brought back everything to the surface, especially her memories of long forgotten days.

The novel is set in the narrative of ‘analeptic’ as it relates the strong ‘flash back’ technique. When she is in her class with the children, she recollects each and every incident connected with her childhood. The novel with its sixteen chapters comes out as a Rangoli (it is a kolam—folk art from India. Rangoli are decorative designs made on the floors of living rooms and courtyards. The ancient symbols have been passed on through the ages, from each generation to the next, thus keeping both the art form and the tradition alive.) with its varied colours and patterns, each blending with other patterns but revealing its distinct design, creating a beautiful carpet. This different Rangoli impersonates the protagonist’s childhood memories, her experience as a puppeteer with her students, her family, friends, schoolmates, her love affairs, music and cello, and her experiences as an actress. Despite confusions and mental agonies, she has the determination to come up in life as a successful cultural mulatto woman. When Virginia
wanted to have “A black Mime” show she was clear in her mind that “Race shouldn’t pose a problem; they all wear masks” (IG 42) to conceal their physique and not their talent.

The prelude depicts the mulatto Virginia’s self-willed independent and individual selfhood with her rejection of the nine-year old girl doll, the first commercially produced black doll in the country, without hair, without limbs, and cheaply made which is a gift from her grandma Evans: “skin brown. Hair black. Eyes small and far apart. Unsmiling” (IG 4). She could never compromise herself to accept the doll and “threw the doll down the stairs” (IG 7). When grandma tries to prove that the doll reflects her image, Virginia objects to the statement and reveals her anger saying, “I don’t like that-why she say it’s supposed to be me?” (IG 3). She never underestimates her image. She has a high opinion of herself. It’s a real constructive force which is in her blood. She doesn’t suffer like other African-American children. African American children suffered a lot and they became great significance in slavery and the slave debate. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* explains how Tom, as an enslaved boy, loses all the ability to access the prerogatives of manhood—a right to protect his family and his own labour. The suffering of Celie as a child in *The Color Purple* is another evidence how African American children suffered economically, physically, and mentally. Virginia has spent her childhood in an environment that is not governed only by the black cultural tradition but also a trans-cultural space. She acquires new spirits and is willing to come out of her “metaphorically colonized self and distances herself from her forebears (mother and grandmother), who tried to sell her a shoddy image she cannot identify with” (Steffen 116). Soon we can see Virginia’s rejection of the doll, “an overturned crab” (IG 7), and she throws the “pickaninny” (IG 4) away from to show her transformation.
When she was a child, Virginia had thrown the hard plastic baby doll out into the street in order to get rid of preconceived notions of black identity and to strive for excellence. Virginia, the mature woman, turned again to take her white doll Penelope which was stinking because it was water logged; that was her *Epiphanic* (moment of sudden understanding or revelation) moment to “move on as an individual”. Any reader will realize the writer’s epiphany to convert those ephemeral thoughts into a work of art. In Dove’s case this is the commitment of her “individual” self to get transformed from both the black and the white worlds without any adjectives and be accepted as a writer. Dove’s interview with Pereira gives this transformation of her *self* to be neither a black nor a white person.

When I went back and started to remember the scene and write it, I realized that that was what disturbed me about that moment. For years I had felt ashamed because I thought that I had rejected the Black doll. They made an ugly little doll, and it wasn’t useful: I couldn’t comb its hair. That’s essential! Obviously, there was not a big market for Black dolls, so they didn’t have to put in a lot of effort. At the end of that section of the novel, the protagonist, Virginia, has grown up and runs across the white doll again, which has gotten waterlogged and stinks now. She throws her away, and for me that was a moment when she got rid of the guilt and was feeling that she could move on as an individual, which was why it was important to have that at the beginning of the novel. (Pereira, *Rita* 161).

Virginia changes from a small child in “seer sucker play suit” *(IG 7)* to a self-identified lady. Here Dove creates two worlds: her willingness to keep the black identity, and her rejection of the old doll, i.e., adoring only “blackness” specifically. Her rejection is symbolic of her allegorical (Europeans colonized Africa in the seventeenth century) self colonization which was accepted by
her parents and grandparents without choice. She wants to forget the tyrannical past of her forebears. When she was a child, she wanted to have a “funny doll” which resembled her. Hence she selects the light skinned flexible Penelope doll to be her friend, a gift from her aunt Carrie. Virginia carries the Penelope doll all the time with her to get stimulation from “Penelope the Model, Penelope the God-fearing Nurse, Penelope the Prize-Winning Journalist, Penelope the girl next Door” (IG 6). Virginia likes the doll very much with its “creamy skin and dimpling cheeks” and “long red hair and plump good looks of Brenda Starr,” (IG 6). Virginia admires the transition. She is reminded of the Sambo puppet show which her grandma had a chance to watch in her childhood: “Little Black Sambo strutted out in his bright clothes and green parasol” (IG 6). The light skin represents the mulatto identity. She is happy with that identity. Sambo wearing a red jacket, blue trousers, purple shoes with crimson soles and lining and a green umbrella attracted Virginia because of its friendliness and the quality of being adaptable or variable. Her adaptability is symbolically presented here. Finally she rejects her favourite Penelope also to get her real identity.

In the interview with Taleb-Khyar Dove asserts her rugged individual hero Virginia who is identical with herself with a staunch individualism in fulfilling others’ expectations.

I try very hard to create characters who are seen as individuals—not only as Blacks or as women but … as persons who have their very individual lives, and whose histories make them react to the world in different ways. One could argue that insisting upon that individuality is ultimately a political act, and to my mind, this is one of the fundamental principles a writer has to uphold. (361)

Virginia, the cellist, mime artist, and puppeteer received her degree in theatre arts from the University of Wisconsin, and joined the Puppets and People, a performing arts troupe, to render
her service. Later when it was disbanded, she chose the National Arts Council to visit public schools introducing students and their communities to puppetry. After becoming a graduate, Virginia came to her native place Edgewood Avenue to see the changes in the place. She used to walk with her white friend Karen in the Monroe Street. There was a board bearing the new name Perkins Woods. The whole feature of the old street had changed. Dove gradually shows the transition in Virginia throughout the novel. Virginia too accepts the change though not showing it outwardly. Dove uses first person narrative to connect the present and the past through the ‘analeptic’ techniques.

The black characters have always been depicted as marginalized and stereotyped. The mulatto characters are shown with a “twoness” that does not belong to either the black community from which they get their identity or the white community in which they live. If the mulatto personality successfully accepts the white community, then it is not a real victory because it is a failure to the community from which she emerged. If she remains as the black heroine accepting all the norms of the black world, then there is no growth as a real challenging heroine of “the New Black Aesthetic.” Dove keeps her heroine in between the two lines, a new opening as a New Black Aesthetic heroine. Dove’s heroine is different with her acceptance of her new emergence, a different identity, with real happiness, challenge, and aspirations. But Virginia’s quest is not to become a white woman; it is rather to have access to the opportunities and privileges that all white people enjoy.

Virginia’s action leads even the disbanded theatre into a flourishing group. She knows very well that the black women scarcely join the drama major. So she gives life to a dead group as she gives life to her dolls with her voice and movements. She makes every puppet a real character with her magical charm. She teaches the children to give life to the dead art. Virginia’s
selection of puppeteering is entirely a new challenge and a rare kind of job to get success. Her job as a puppeteer gives space for the heroine to be enthusiastic. Puppet shows are a great way to let children act out imaginative stories that have no bounds. And there are script ideas and possibilities all around us every day. Children pay closer attention to what is being said and retain the information better with visual clues. With a little practice, anyone can put on an entertaining puppet show for the children to enjoy. Many children have a hard time coming up with ideas for creative writing. Often, it’s a lack of motivation that holds them back; after all, it’s not much fun struggling for bright ideas if nothing is going to be done with those ideas. Creative freedom for the children emerges from puppet shows. This puppet story is fully interactive with the children as audience.

Dove aims to make the art of puppetry the main theme of her novel. Puppets can work on the edge between entertainment and information. They line up alongside drama, storytelling, drumming and dance as art forms that can also teach and persuade. The entertainment comes first. We accept the message without even realizing that we are learning from the puppets. Virginia tells her affiliation with American culture through the puppet Gina: “I have two: black and white. My best friend’s Zebra” (IG 85). She reveals her rootedness in black culture and her readiness to embrace “trans-culture.” No one can separate black from white from a Zebra. She combines her new identity by giving her address as “123 Transformation Drive, Locker box, USA” (IG 85). Lessons learned in this way are more likely to be remembered and to become part of the children’s solid stock of knowledge. Her selection of the colours black and white and her favourite animal ‘zebra’ symbolize her cultural ‘hybridity’ and her mulatto identity to justify how she embraced both her ‘roots’ and her ‘living’ race with happiness. She lives in a new bond between the white and the black cultures.
Virginia’s special feature is her discerning nature. She selects the colors white and yellow, the colors of accomplishment. She often dreams in which her T shirt is yellow and her shorts is white. While she is running, her hair “long and shining red as the tulip” is spreading behind her. People admire her beauty and say, “Isn’t she lovely?” She is black in her dream but a “wild deer, an antelope” (*IG* 9). Her transformation as a cultural mulatto is highlighted here.

Dove creates a world of superiority with her scholarship, achievements, excellence, and talents. Virginia gets straight A’s, does well in her university, is an accomplished actress and is offered a part in an off Broadway play. All these successes get her a red carpet welcome to enter the ivory gate. The children adore her. She receives heartwarming tributes from most of the characters in the book: for her looks, her intelligence, and her achievements. This is her real identity and she wants “to fit her existence into some kind of framework,” and “Efficiency” is “her salvation” (*IG* 39).

Though there are emotional, cultural, and social barriers in the life of Virginia, she overcomes all these with her *self-understanding, self esteem, her self-love, and self-freedom*. Her double-consciousness and trans-cultural difficulties are only ostensible; she tackles everything with her artistic temperament and maturity. A brilliant woman, musician, actress, and teacher like Virginia can never be defeated by the restrictions of race, or any other discrimination. Though the blacks have every potential to excel like the other races, they are crushed at every stage of their growth. They are humiliated by the whites. But Virginia is able to challenge white superiority with her educational empowerment.

When Virginia was a student, she showed her “starry report card” to her white schoolmate Karen, Karen couldn’t tolerate her inferiority before an African American girl who stood with her towering personality and she couldn’t concede her talents, instead she “stumped
on it” to insult her by pushing her down (Here the writer’s job is very excellent in making a white girl feeling jealous of a black girl on educational ground.). Though Virginia felt like a broken glass jar, closing her off from the world, she could recuperate soon. This incident is compared to her playful actions of catching the crickets and keeping them in mayonnaise jars at the hard side of the snow mound to have control over these poor creatures. She realizes her mistakes. Virginia withstands the insult of Karen with her inner strength. Karen mocks at her racial degradation, which is the only way of wounding the towering personality. Karen shouts out calling her “Nigger!” which is only a scar in the mind of Virginia, but not a fresh wound to draw blood. Dove has cleverly reversed the situation making a white feel jealous of an African American. This is the only ground an African American girl has to throw her challenge at a white. This is quite reminiscent of what Du Bois says in “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” that he desires to beat the whites in his exams. The real achievement of the writer lies in freezing those moments in history when certain momentous changes occur.

Walker, a contemporary of Dove, has written six novels. She projects the male characters with all their feelings and weaknesses. Each male is tainted. The first novel “The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970) is indeed too harsh. Copeland ill-treats his wife, and has extra marital affair. His son enters into the world of lust and indulges in forbidden sex. It is the story of Grange Copeland, a man who lives a life full of degradation and oppression, and accepts it as a natural state. Brownfield beats and eventually kills Meme and is jailed for seven years. Grange finds the North unfulfilling and returns to Baker County, which is the only place he knows of as home. But Dove’s male characters Ernie, Parker, Clayton, Renee, and Terry consider the positive side of life. The second novel Meridian (1976) captures the complications involved in the black-white and black-black relations. Born into a middle-class Southern black family, Meridian is
taught to accept the racist and sexist status quo of the 1950’s. She is not encouraged to question segregationist policies, sexist traditions, or her own sexual ignorance—all of which deny her autonomy. Meridian gets pregnant in high school and has a short-lived marriage with her child’s father, and then joins the Civil Rights Movement and gives up her son to go to college. Meridian finds herself unable to commit to the violence of the Civil Rights Movement and begins becoming ill, a manifestation of her conflicts about the injustice she sees in the world. This novel is based more on personal interaction than universal themes. Dove has created a cordial relationship between white (Kelly) and black (Virginia) characters.

The third novel *The Color Purple* (1982) is written in the epistolary tradition. Celie suffers throughout the novel *The Color Purple*. She undergoes all traumatic experiences, living in a world of worries. Her letters written to God reveal her sufferings. She can’t share her problems with other human beings. The loneliness of Celie is a great marker of African American suffering. Virginia does not have the chance to undergo such experiences with her educational improvement, stoutheartedness and courageous spirit. She has her friend Parker to share her experiences with, her grandma to get advice from, and her mother to get love. Dove’s Virginia is certainly different from all the heroines of Walker. Virginia tries to find space to squeeze herself in the elite world of education to face the challenges in her life.

Dove’s heroines are positively oriented unlike the heroines of Morrison. In *The Bluest Eye* Pecola is a troubled young girl with a hard life, whose parents are constantly fighting, both physically and verbally. Pecola is continually being told and reminded of what an “ugly” girl she is, thus fueling her desire to be white with blue eyes. Throughout the novel, it is revealed that not only Pecola but also her parents had a life full of hatred and hardships. *Sula* is a story of the friendship of two black women (Sula and Nel) over a period of almost forty-five years. It also
tells the sufferings of the two black women Sula, and Sethe’s hard life. *Beloved* explores the physical, emotional, and spiritual devastation wrought by slavery, a devastation that continues to haunt those characters, who are former slaves, even in freedom. The most dangerous of slavery’s effects is its negative impact on the former slaves’ senses of self, and the novel contains multiple examples of self-alienation and killing of her baby. Virginia takes all obstacles as challenges and converts everything into her stepping stones.

The reminiscence of her frustrated first love for the cellist Clayton Everett, a gay, who preferred men, as well as her commitment to the arts with many constraints, Virginia never allows her spirit to die, but she creates a new and more hopeful association to revive her love with Terry Murray, the divorced father of one of her students, Renee. Her new and challenging love with a second-handed man (a widower) Terry Murray, gives her happiness. She quickens her spirit again when she develops her love for Terry Murray who is her real companion. Steffen concedes Virginia’s “inner progress from love’s disappointment and pain to a new hopefulness and state of independence” (Steffen 113). Virginia willingly accepts the positive side of life. She invigorates her spirit again without shedding its premier quality when she finds a right person. She doesn’t lose her hope and she dusts her memory immediately. She wants herself in “the professional world” to make her life an example to others and “being herself” (Steffen 114) with her real identity as an African American. Finally Dove migrates “to explore the way a personal and cultural identity develops within the dialectics of home as mainstream United States and a sense of strangeness for a young African-American Artist within this very home” (Steffen 114). Madhu Dubey in *Signs and Cities* cites the ideas of Hooks and says that “postmodern critiques of essentialism are valuable because they compel recognition of multiple identities and divergent interests within the category of blackness” (33).
Dove’s *Through the Ivory Gate* creates a hybrid blend of American culture and African culture. Virginia’s friendship with Kelly, her white friend, reveals her acceptance of the white world. The mulatto character Virginia gets along fine with her white friend. According to Dove, America is her own home and the people are her neighbours and friends. She bridges the void between the black and the white worlds. Here Dove proves her theory of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism very clearly. Virginia’s psychological journey along with her physical journey is in a circular form. The whole family moves from Akron, Ohio, to Phoenix, Madison, when she is a child. Now as a young heroine she again makes her journey back to Akron to search for her roots, to recall her childhood memory in Oberlin, and finally determines to reach New York, the place meant for art and life. This shows the final attainment of Virginia who tries a very tough journey to reach the middle from the periphery. Her play doll gets transformed as a moving life-like figure of a puppet. She has given life to it finally through her new vision, her own voice to the puppets while taking classes to the students, a kind of real fulfillment of finding a voice and an identity as an African American Woman “to reclaim” her past. Virginia feels that “she hated to fall into stereotyping,” but it is “true” (*IG* 25). Here, Dove transcends the issue of race.

Dove’s ethnicity, her tradition, her race, never stop her from becoming an individual with her uncompromising sense of self. Dove lives in a free world unlike the other black women who struggled to write during the antebellum period. She is liberated to enlighten the mass with her buoyancy. Dove frees her mind from the problems of race. She stands “on the top of the mountain, free within herself” as Langston Hughes claims. He wants to “build” the “temples for tomorrow as strong as we know” (309). Dove strongly erects a temple not for tomorrow, but for today. Dove creates a “hybridity” in the real sense of the term.
The title of this novel is given in chapter nine through the words of Parker. He quoted Homer’s Odyssey about the “two gates.”

‘Two gates for ghostly dreams there are: one gateway of honest horn, and one way of ivory. Issuing by the ivory gate are dreams of glimmering illusion, fantasies, but those that come through solid polished horn may be borne out, if mortals only know them.’ … We’re playing with shadows, pretending they’ll come to life with the first rays of the full moon. And we learn to do it so well that other people believe in the shadows…To others, the shadows are real. Only to us they’re not. (IG 153-154)

Homer’s “Odyssey” talks about “the gates of honest horn”, and “the ivory gate.” Homer strongly believes that our “true dreams” pass through “the gates of honest horn” and “illusions and fantasies” can pass through “the ivory gate.” Here Steffen is of the view that Virginia as an artist is “familiar with the notion of illusion that is the proscenium as well as the shifting between imagination and reality” (Steffen 112). Virginia is already in the ivory gate with her talents.

Beulah, the central character of her poetry collections, is not ready to accept the new racial climate which is offered to her during the picnic in Thomas and Beulah. But Virginia as a new cultural mulatto willingly accepts what is required for a liberated self rather than live in a world of obstruction. On Halloween, Virginia selects the gate of honest horn to partake in a play leaving the ingenuous world of the children and their beaming fantasies. Virginia ideally selects the ivory gate which is her choice of living. In the new trend, the ivory gate is not only the entrance to “illusions and fantasies” but also to “true dreams”. If we analyze with a deeper sense, these “ivory gates and gates of honest horn” are not actual. They are detached from reality.
Dove’s cultural mulatto identity is proved by Pereira in his article “When the pear Blossoms… Critical Essay”:

The novel’s title, after all, is *Through the Ivory Gate*, a title suggestive of her one-way, no-turning-back passage through the gates of traditionally white-identified, middle-class, college-educated experiences. Such a title suggests that the main tension of the novel might be expressed as a question: How does one maintain racial and cultural affiliation when one has gone through the ivory gate and become culturally mixed? It’s not as if Virginia can turn back. The “ivory” not only connotes white culture, but it also suggests value, and value her passage she does. … To go through the ivory gate describes the sexual penetration of a white woman, the “taboo” miscegenous crossing in American culture for black men. That threshold has been locked until the recent history of Virginia’s (and Dove’s) generation. It has also been, then, a “taboo” crossing culturally for blacks, one that must be repressed, at least as far as some in the older generations in the black community are concerned. Thus, in the novel, the revelation of incest near the end of the novel, in the logic of repression, validates the protagonist’s passage through the ivory gate as a cultural mulatto figure. It “explains” something from her origin that shapes her to make that choice. (*AAR* 205-206).

The bulk of *Through the Ivory Gate* describes the major transformation of Rita Dove’s approach to black culture. The word *ivory* connotes not only white culture but also black “values” and the new African American heritage. Her themes are beyond segregation, migration, race and gender. She concentrates on racial uplift and her themes and insights are focused on the self sacrificing individual Virginia who represents Dove.
Finally Dove’s dream has come true with the newly elected African American President Barrack Obama. Dove makes a clarion call to all African Americans to enjoy freedom, as she breathes the air of liberty, freedom, fraternity in her literary world. The ivory gate Dove talks of is her triumphant entrance into the mainstream of the United States. She wants her race also to cross the threshold and enter the ivory gate with their special attire of distinctiveness i.e., the attire of wisdom, the attire of knowledge and the attire of excellence.

Much modern and postmodern literatures especially African-American literature deals with themes of suffering and how characters deal with suffering. It is Pecola’s suffering and self-hatred that are responsible for her death in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Walker’s Celie suffered in *Colour Purple*. It is suffering that creates the illusion of invisibility in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. But Dove’s Virginia stands as an individual to face the world even though she undergoes sufferings. In suffering, she learns to be courageous, confident, and optimistic. On the basis of her biological appearance and slave ancestry, the beliefs and values of the dominant white society and popular culture racially classify the people as blacks. But the protagonist challenges this stereotypic classification and affirms her individuality by describing herself as a good cello player, puppeteer, and music fan of Bach. Her selection of job according to her taste, her rejection of Terry’s marriage proposal, gives space for improvisation and growth into a blues heroine. She has never withdrawn herself from the world, instead her “art is a means of confrontation and immersion” says Jablon in *Meta physics* (63).

In the first place, this novel brings out life’s twists and tests in identifying love, betrayals, forgiveness, and memories of marginalization in the life of Virginia and Virginia’s confrontation with arts, a unique selection, keeps her glowing like a star amidst her realities. Dove creates a unique position in the African American canon with her verbal mastery, artistic attraction,
linguistic representation, technicality, creative substance, narrative style, and deep analysis. The novel slowly moves into the foreground to make more visible or prominent themes like fantasy, childhood, oppression of the Black race by the white, Black experience, and the ways to come out of oppression as a cultural mulatto. Virginia as a blues heroine accepts the misfortunes at any cost. In the first place, she forgives her Aunt Carrie for her teenage incestuous relationship with her father, and her longing for a gay man Terry Murray is also taken light heartedly. She foregoes the limited opportunity before her and selects the rare type of job as a puppeteer. Virginia, the humane character, listens to others in their misfortune. These are the special features of a cultural mulatto personality in Dove’s specific perception.

In the second place, Virginia’s development from an innocent little Sambo doll to the experience of a tiger to participate a black militant is a real challenge. Her individuation is remarkable with a gradual and determined growth. Dove makes her heroine more powerful as the novel proceeds. Virginia’s veracity is symbolic in her Cello with a picture of a tiger. When she brought the Cello close to her, she was “taming it before she was torn limb to limb. She had to love and not be scared … (IG 23)” of the tiger. Her intention is to reach the center position of the United States of America, one of the post colonial themes that ‘periphery comes to the centre’. She fulfills her dream by reaching New York.

In music, Dove has achieved greatness in her real life. In the novel also, Dove has explained the musical Suites. Each Suite shows Virginia’s independent nature, and her individuality, and her achievements. Especially, the Sixth Suite reflects her triumph over pain and her ability to move on. “It was less indulgently sorrowful than the Fifth, more self-possessed and bittersweet and-adult, a chin lifted to the chill wind. It was the suite of departure, the conscious leave-taking of one who knows when it’s time to move on” (IG 258). The real voice of the
protagonist and the narrator (Dove) sustains the individuality, womanhood and the racial identity. The Indian Dalit literature also confronts the same kind of challenge. In India, the low caste people face the same problem of discrimination. Bama, one of the pioneers of the Dalit feminist literature, voices to draw the New Indian Aesthetics of not only the Dalit fiction, but also to set apart a pro-action and transformation in the life of the contemporary Dalit women. Despite her misfortunes, Bama speaks through all her characters. Her novel Sangathi strongly discloses her inner strength as a militant writer of her community. She communicates to her Dalit women in Sangathi:

We must be strong. We must show by our own resolute lives that we believe ardently in our independence. I told myself that we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged, and broken in the belief that this is our fate. Just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive. (59)

Like Dove, Bama also links together caste and gender oppression, in the process redefining women from the socio-cultural perspective. Bama succeeds in taking the position of the subaltern to the centre. Similarly, Dove also asserts her individuality from her race prejudices, and calls herself a model, “not that I’d want to forget being Black, but I would love to walk through life without the anxiety of being prejudiced and pigeonholed on the basis of my race. I am aware that at any moment I could simply judged for my color alone” (Taleb Khyar 79). Virginia combines two melodies to create polyphony like a musician “both counterpoint and improvisation are central to Virginia’s development. Counterpoint suggests appreciating the beauty of each individual, each melody, while at the same time appreciating the community, the collective sounds and individuals” (Jablon 62). We see “the nine o’clock sun pressed flat into the pasty sky
A neighbour has upper arms “spongy as Wonder bread (IG 73).” We hear music like “a leaf shaken of the last rain (IG 148).” “There are several climatic moments when Virginia must choose between two courses of action—one reflecting her own idiosyncrasies and personal inclinations and another improvisation to life and trusting her own intuition, she makes the right choice” (Jablon 63).

There is a unification of both aesthetic systems of culture in her novel. She creates a “metafiction” in the words of Patricia Waugh “to explore the relationship between the world of fiction and the world outside the fiction” (3) that achieves self-consciousness through the ramifications of artist-protagonist, blues heroine, and her art. Her choice of the puppet Gina with its large, “Afro and wide-spread slanted eyes” (IG 34), in yellow sleeves proclaims her cultural mulatto identity. Virginia’s new companion Terry Murray is also shown as a cultural mulatto with his “pale coffee color.” Terry Murray “had liquid brown eyes in a face … a face as finely chiseled as an Egyptian mask, she thought. His Afro was rounded and shining. Even his mustache was shining” (IG 113). Again Dove’s treatment of the individualism and boldness with which Virginia rejects the gay man and switches over to a new and refreshing love for a genuine man is highlighted.

Virginia’s name is given with the “destiny” (IG 59) according to her grandma. Dove reflects the growth of women in general when she made a reference to the number of woman teachers working in the school. Women’s liberation and the emerging liberation of the black people are beautifully drawn. Dove’s creation of woman in her novel is yet another example of the emerging liberated women from the existing reality. “Bell hated gossip” (IG 88).

Chapter nine opens with Virginia’s exhilaration with her tour to the Canadian falls. “Finally, sunshine! A glorious Saturday afternoon lay before her unopened, the crisp air reviving
in her the thrill of freedom, of exploration” (*IG* 133). Dove’s words are very clear that “clean and bright,” “she rasped like a parrot,” (*IG* 142) to denote her freedom even in the white world. She can accept any place as her home place even as the Tamil poet Kaniyan Pookundran feels that “every town a home town, every man a kinsman.” Dove’s love for travel gives her rich knowledge. Travelling brings recreation, research, relaxation, discovery, exploration, interpersonal relationship, and introduction to new cultures and traditions. Virginia’s love for education brought her to the lime light within a short period in her life as a great person.

Virginia loves college for its elusive goals, its fictive freedom. The instant she sets foot on the green quadrangle outside the dormitory, she feels a sharp and delicious thrill. Not that her parents keep her in a cage, nor that she hasn’t always been encouraged to “exercise her mind” (Dad) and “expand her horizons” (Belle); even before the day she’d brought home her first straight–A report card … “professional”–a doctor, a lawyer, a dentist or psychologist, even a teacher–some job befitting her “scholastic abilities.” (*IG* 93)

Virginia does not wish to fulfill her mother’s desire to “advance the race” (*IG* 94) but “pantomime was Virginia’s passion. She gorged herself on the biographies of Chaplin and Barrault. She found text books on mime and tried to follow the exercises” (*IG* 94) to master the art. When Professor Barks enquires “why endanger your progress in order to study a dead art for which there are no jobs?” she is very firm in her answer that she “finished the drama prerequisites and became eligible for casting … over a dozen studio productions ranging from one-acts to full-length” (*IG* 95). She is talented in giving more than “twenty kinds of laughter in Chinese theatre: she scoffed, snorted, smirked and sniggered, chortled and chukled, giggled, and tittered, roared and cachinnated” (*IG* 96).
Virginia’s progression is designed step by step by Dove as a garland with colourful flowers with beautiful decorations: (i) her childhood and rejection of the traditional black doll and selection of a more lively colourful doll according to her taste; (ii) her triumphant entrance into the world of puppets as a teacher for the elementary school children; (iii) her experience as a cello artist and musician; (iv) and finally her role as an actress in the Broadway play. She enters the world of “ivory” which may be the white culture, or white community, or the world of black values with her distinct focus on individuality and talents. She is very brave to fit her existence into some kind of framework. This is definitely a novel on the progression of an artist. This is a rare kind of African American novel to go beyond the obsession with race found in the earlier African American writings. The mulatto characters are culturally hybrid. Dove’s novel is actually an artist’s challenge to tell the story of her social, racial, and artistic awakening through her living.

This is a novel of growth. Virginia is an example of “the New Black Aesthetic” that Ellis champions as a cultural mulatto. Ultimately, this novel tends to rediscover the new aesthetic tradition of black with the American aesthetic tradition and thereby claiming her rootedness in American belongingness. Virginia gained confidence in her quest for knowledge, excellence, and artistic achievement. As far as Dove’s hope is concerned, she is one who considers herself to be worthy of everything. In *Through the Ivory Gate* Virginia’s mother Bell admires Virginia and says, “Now you look elegant” and “you’re a fine piece of woman” (*IG* 81).

Virginia’s crossing through American culture is the miscegenous crossing, or entering into the ivory gate and it continues in her verse play *The Darker Face of the Earth* too. Dove acknowledges individualism in each character when she creates them and this technique is the secret of her writing style too. Dove focuses not only on the topics that invoked the never ending
fight of slavery, but also on the regular people of different backgrounds. We know only the positive side of Dove’s life but there were times when she was pitied in Germany for being black. Her self-assertiveness makes her life a real victory and a real challenge. Her characters in the major novel and the verse play are surely modeled upon her self-willed nature to face any sort of crisis. Hence, Dove is a great representative of her age. This attitude is evidently shown in the verse play *The Darker Face of the Earth*.

Augustus Newcastle in the post colonial sense the ‘hybrid’ character is “a tall, handsome young man with caramel-toned skin and piercing eyes. His righteous anger is thinly concealed behind his slave mannerisms” (*DFE* 47). He has his spirit of knowledge to handle everyone and his human concern to understand the human emotions. He survives the attempted infanticide. He returns to Jennings Plantation as an “educated nigger,” “the most talked about nigger” (*DFE* 43), “smart” (*DFE* 44), “wild nigger” (*DFE* 46), “mighty tough” (*DFE* 46) who knows Greek mythology, the Bible, Milton, and the world. He can read, write, and count. After twenty years, Augustus is back to the pavilion as a new slave i.e., the black hero of the play, with “‘Twenty Two / acts of aggression and rebellion.” Twenty two separate acts!” (*DFE* 44). Amalia brings back her son to her own plantation as she brings Augustus. Augustus conquers the white plantation woman with his educational empowerment and his talent in removing his inferiority complex and insecurity generated by his race. Through the character Augustus, Dove juxtaposes socialism and capitalism; corruption and politics; and past and present. In contrast to Hector, the black father of Augustus, Augustus the mulatto is richly endowed with double heritage; he is willing to give resurrection to his race. Finally, Augustus becomes a hero of redemption like Moses relieving the Israelites from the mighty hands of the Pharaoh.
Dove revisits myth in the modern context or remythologizes this creative mutation of Sophocles’ tragedy in the African American context by integrating both European myths and the dynamics of the cultural mulatto theme by giving the cultural ethos to African American tradition. Dove as an African American writer syncretizes the theme of the oedipal taboo with the age old theme of American slavery and the miscegenation, a new focus since the Civil War period. Louis La Farge is replaced by Laius, Jocusta is replaced by Amalia Jennings La Farge, the prophet Teiresias is replaced by the voodoo woman Scylla, and a slave woman who does the role of a commentator. The central character Augustus Newcastle is the son of Hector the slave lover of Amalia. In Oedipus, his fate was already set at birth and the audience knows this fate, before the drama begins. According to mythology, the central character, Oedipus of Thebes, the son of Laius and Jocusta, killed his father and married his own mother unknowingly.

Dove does not want to imitate the white community, but she identifies her individuality. Dove as a black poet seems to have taken the ideas of the white literary world and incorporated them in the culture of the black people. She is not an anti-white, but she wants to prove the dictum that all Americans are children of America, irrespective of their race and culture. Dove waits for equality. As a black humanist, she tries to bring unity between the black and the white communities. America, a country known for its multiculturalism, should come forward to take up the challenge of the unification of its people, as all the inmates of the country arrived as colonizers once. Dove, the cultural poetic person is a “poet and a rebel” according to Pereira when he writes “that Augustus’s cultural amalgamation is imbued with Dove’s own cosmopolitan poetic persona becomes clear in Amalia Jennings’s appraisal of him as “a poet / as well as a rebel”” (Pereira, Rita 37). But Dove brings revolutionary ideas through her characters—not a rebel but a social reformer and trend setter. Dove’s The Darker Face of the
Earth is beyond doubt a great literary work in African American Literature. A reader can feel inexpressible delight in reading this play for its remarkable terseness and condensation.

The monarch Oedipus, a stranger to the city of Thebes, married the widow of the former king as a reward for his unraveling the riddle of the murderous Sphinx some decades ago. Dove creates a similar Oedipus figure in Augustus, the son of the African slave Hector, with his union with his white owner and childhood friend Amalia Jennings. Hector is shown as a real defeated Warrior, the subjugated lover of Amalia. But in contrast to Hector, Augustus the mulatto is neither meek and docile as his father, nor overwhelming as his mother. He maintains his leadership of the liberators, his grip over the slaves, his personal relationship with Amalia, his affinity with Phebe, and his detachment with Scylla.

Augustus proves that his community could be uplifted to the next level of living when the white superiority is killed. He removes the curse as a champion by sacrificing his own parents to give space to new hope and freedom. Dove as an optimist of new life has created a curse which will lead not to any kind of destruction, but to a path of freedom. There is scope for regeneration when he kills white animosity (Louis). Augustus kills his father Hector, who represents the age old ‘slavery.’ He kills the old order of slavery (Hector) as well as the cause of slavery (Louis). When Amalia learns that Augustus is her son, she naturally allows for his real freedom and makes him the heir to her property by stabbing herself. There is regeneration and reconciliation at the end of the story. Dove makes a clear point to have blood relationships with white people to get genuine love and understanding as Amalia. Though Augustus brings a curse, he does not die of it, but lives to destroy the curse and to lead the mass to freedom. Shakespeare made all his tragic heroes die at the end in order to prove his dictum “character is destiny.” But Dove is willing to create a character born in a critical situation as a black baby, is sent out to be killed,
and yet comes back the same place with all the might to relieve his people from white imperialism. Naturally Dove’s approach is new and yet challenging. Dove, being a cultural mulatto, could bring out such a possibility with courage.

Though the play is about the mother and son relationship on the surface level, it focuses mainly on how a young African American faces the controversies of the white world. The entire play is in two Acts with eight scenes. The play ends with the positive hope of freedom. If Augustus is not the redeemer of his race who else can bring freedom? All his life, Augustus shows an acute sense of law and morality which mark his character. In a free world, individualism amounts to inconsequential actions. In a wider sense the choices we make determine our destiny and define our ideological stance. The country should have the ability to stem the menace by cementing the social relation to enjoy individual freedom. Augustus is a man who tries to universalize the theme of freedom.

*The Darker face of the Earth* in the first place is a story of a cultural mulatto and a white woman who gave birth to a mulatto son, thus violating one of the most rigid taboos of Southern society. But the birth of a son was kept a secret by the doctor and her husband. Toomer’s *Becky* also confronts the same situation, where the white woman gives birth to two mulatto sons, violating the rules of Southern society, and she is banished by the community as in the case of Hester Prynne. But in Dove’s work, the white woman is not banished for her act of miscegenation. The changing situation is clear with the white lady who loves to have a son by a black man whom she really admires. After the birth of her son, she genuinely adores her son and loves him deeply. She never considers the black son a sin; instead she wants to possess the child despite her husband’s threats. She is even ready to cut-off her life from her husband, who is a lifeless creature for her. It shows the individuality of female characters and the individual
creation of Dove in particular. Dove goes beyond thinking, crosses racial determinants and shines as a “world citizen.” Dove also asserts her artistic independence:

In my poems, and in my stories, too, I try very hard to create characters who are seen as individuals not only as Blacks or as women, or whatever, but as a Black woman with her own particular problems, or one White bum struggling in a specific predicament as persons who have their very individual lives, and whose histories make them react to the world in different ways.”… One could argue that insisting upon that individuality is ultimately a political act, and to my mind, this is one of the fundamental principles a writer has to uphold, along with a warning: don’t be swallowed up. Don’t be swallowed up. (Ingersoll 83)

Dove creates not only the black hero as an individual, but also Amalia, the white woman as an individual with her multi-dimensional, nurturing and loving character. Dove seems no longer to fear intra-racial censure over such a depiction. The changes in Hector’s and Amalia’s characters suggest that Dove, having articulated the primal scene of the cultural mulatto, feels free to cross such cultural boundaries enacting her cosmopolitan identity as an artist.

Augustus has already seen the Haitian revolution, how the Haitians fought with the white men and quickly joined the planned slaves’ insurrection meeting in his own plantation. When Augustus becomes a hero, he is considered the redeemer as Israelites considered Moses their redeemer. Dove specifically brings the Biblical connection with Augustus from his birth. According to the Book of Exodus Moses was born in Egypt to Hebrew parents, who set him afloat on the Nile in a reed basket to save him from an authoritative proclamation of the death of all newborn Hebrew males to uproot their race. The Pharaoh’s daughter found him in the Nile. He was brought up by the king’s daughter to get freedom for the Israelites. After killing an
Egyptian taskmaster, he fled to Midian, where he got Yahweh’s (God) revelation in a burning bush. Moses was expected to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. He came back as the redeemer of the Israelites. Augustus was also sent in a sewing basket as Moses was sent in a basket.

Augustus voluntarily involves himself in the conspiracy between slaves and freedmen. Dove expects some black heroes to get freedom for her people. Augustus wants to sacrifice himself to the cause of freedom. His personal inclinations can’t be counted at all. On the whole Augustus is created as a protector of the black people. Most plays have a conflict of some kind between individuals, between man and society, man and some superior force or man and himself. The story derives its significance from the complex notions of responsibility with a conflict between ethics and duty.

Dove exhibits great skill and dramatic caliber in her portrayal of the protagonist Augustus. Dove is said to have borrowed her theme from Greek mythology, but she presents the story with uniqueness. The treatment of the theme is equally unique. *The Darker Face of the Earth* reflects in many ways Eliot’s conception of a “perfect verse play,” and at the same time reaches beyond the function Eliot ascribes to art of “imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality”’” (Phillips 105). Dove amalgamates the “African-American aesthetic and historical referents into the core of the Greek text” (Phillips 105). Dove’s power of poetry in her play exhibits her consummate artistry. We have poetry of sadness, love, and struggle. Amalia, a humane character, is presented by Dove with great poetic insight and sympathy. Though Amalia gives way to sexual passion and thereby allows her son to be her lover with her involuntary miscegenation, her real motherly affection makes us forgive Amalia at the end.

After finding the secrets of his birth and his mother, Augustus’s task to kill his mother becomes a question mark. He resembles the Shakespearean heroes. Antony was torn between the
call of duty and the call of beauty; Augustus also suffered and was torn between his love for his mother and his duty which was entrusted to him by the liberators. But Amalia wants her son safe from both oedipal problem and from the problem of matricide. The conspirators are very suspicious about Augustus because of his love for Amalia which leads to “betrayal and death” (DFE 125). Amalia stabs herself before Augustus stops her. The conspirators enjoy their victory over the death of the white plantation masters. Augustus, the slave hero, fights for his own freedom as well as the freedom of his comrades. He fights not only for freedom but also for his self-dignity. When somebody regards him as a redeemer, and salvation provider, he wants to prove his sacrificing nature even pushing aside his (lost) love for his most wanted mother.

At the end of the play, the protagonist kills his own father Hector; falling in love with his own mother Amalia; killing his white step-father Louis; and attempts patricide unknowingly. As a Redeemer of the slaves and confidant performer of the conspirators, he never allows his mother to escape, which confirms his sense of ethics and humanitarian rationale. This is the central paradox of any discussion on the philosophical issue of ethics and duty. As his aim is to get freedom for his comrades, he never fails in his responsibility as a chieftain. The whole lot is waiting for relief from white imperialism. Augustus even after learning that the white woman is his mother keeps up his spirit to relieve the slaves from the clutches of the whites.

The post colonial dictum says that the periphery comes to the centre which is true in the case of The Darker Face of the Earth. In all possible ways the slaves try to attack the suppressors. The leader of the conspiracy incites the people:

Destiny calls us! The reckoning is nigh!

But remember: trust no-one.

All those who are not with us
are against us, blacks as well

as whites. Oh, do not falter!

Bolster your heart with the memory

of the atrocities committed upon your mothers,

Gird your loins with vengeance,

strap on the shining sword of freedom! (DFE 71)

Again the leader prepares the slaves to get ready for their mission. He continues to inspire them by saying: “Patience, my son! Cunning. / Sow discontent among your brethren, / Inspire them to fury” (DFE 71).

*The Darker Face of the Earth* has many truths to reveal. Man’s external circumstances are completed when his character is confined in his destiny. Augustus’s destiny probed into the life of many people like Amalia, Louis LaFarge, Hector, and others. The play has only two acts with eight scenes each. Number eight has its own significance when Augustus gives reference to the waters of Caribbean and the then Revolution of the natives of Haiti.

Black men meeting in the forest:

Eight days, they whispered,

and we’ll be free. For eight days

bonefirs flashed in the hills:

Equality. For eight days

tom-toms spoke in the mountains:

Liberty. For eight days

the tom-toms sang: Brothers and sisters.

And on the eighth day, swift as lightning,
the salves attacked…

……… then the sun

broke through the smoke and shone

upon a new nation, a black nation –

Haiti! (DFE 75)

Dove also has the hope of seeing such a new morn with liberated souls in the post modern world. So she uses specifically eight scenes in both the acts. Eight represents continuation, repetition, and a cycle. Success is obtained simply because of dogged determination and repetition. It is like the ball as it continues to roll to create each revolution. The Catholic Church has always revered the number eight meaning the “Resurrection,” the eighth day of “Creation.” Dove’s symbolic use of the number eight is to bring back a new beginning with the cleansing of her race from their bondage to slavery. Dove wants to have resurrection and a new beginning for her race. The two acts may refer to two different cultures namely: the white and the black. She tries to make it a united tradition through her powerful assertion of writing. Though she can’t change people like Louis La Farge, Dove as a humanist tries to unify both the cultures to get a multicultural society of real human beings like Amalia, and the white captain who brought up Augustus.

In this play, the writer explores the thematic conflicts between good and evil, order and chaos, and truth and deception. The tone is one of a dark voice at the end. It shows the black experience in the hands of the white and the causes of the protagonists’ violent behavior. His personal relation with the white woman and his private relationship with the conspirators are clearly presented in the play. There is a rich mixture of character, style, and theme in the play. There is only a single voice which dominates the entire play, the voice of a black male child and
its pathetic condition after birth. The dialogue is realistic; sometimes coarse to suit the occasion. The descriptive passages are often musical with lyrical intensity.

The deaths of the major characters except Augustus at the end can be viewed as a cleansing return to origins, to the truth of an original trauma that, now articulated, sets free those who remain. Plot and theme should go hand in hand. If the theme is one of nobility, or dignity, the plot must concern events and characters that measure up to that theme. There is a sense of community and belongingness, value of love and loyalty. The hero is strong willed and capable of heroism. There is freedom of action in the play. Dove would like to return to nature with the rejection of superficialities.

Dove clearly presents her heroes (both Hector and Augustus) as admirable, commendable, and venerable personalities. Dove never underestimates her heroes and heroines. Hence Dove identifies her hero with a king’s name Augustus (the name of a king), and Hector, a mighty warrior (abandoned by the Gods). Her characters are not very submissive, but are protesters. They never consider the deplorable predicament of their race as a hindrance to achieve their success. This play is certainly a protest play.

Amalia is shown as “an attractive white woman … who exhibits more intelligence and backbone than is generally credited to a Southern belle” (DFE 145). She has a “cool, sweet look” (DFE 117, 160). She learns the job from her father to calculate inventory. Amalia loves both the black heroes. Hector is admired and loved by the plantation Mistress Amalia. Racialization is a class and age generated phenomenon for Amalia. She grew up playing with slave children, as was customary in the antebellum south. She was attracted by the slave Hector (the first hero) and fell in love with Hector. Hector was once a young lover. She could find a kind of respect in Hector which was absent in her own husband Louis. She was ready to lose her husband for the
sake of her nigger child. The child was born out of their unification of love and not out of slavery. Amalia loved the child very much, but situations compelled her to break her relation with her new born black baby. She had to save the life of the new born baby. The oppression is not only for black women but also for white women. Though Amalia belonged to the white community, she couldn’t bring up the child as she desired. Dove’s universal appeal makes all her works the best creation of the world.

Through Augustus, Dove proves the natural cycle of destruction which brings a new creation and which is believed by the vision of Yoruba philosophy and the philosophy of many optimistic people of Africa. The end of the drama highlights the real freedom expected by Martin Luther King, who aspired for freedom in his “I Have a Dream.” He dreamt of the freedom:

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning- “my country ‘its of thee; sweet land of liberty; of thee I sing; land were my fathers died; land if the pilgrim’s pride; from every mountain side, let freedom ring”- and if America is to be a great nation, this become true. (NA 82)

Dove has the same freedom in her mind which is celebrated in her verse play with the same vigour. All the slaves shout “freedom, freedom, freedom…” (DFE 150) carrying Augustus on their shoulders with the torch bearing woman (the narrator) standing at the door as the indication of light, though Scylla sets fire to the window’s billowing curtains to put an end to their cry. The fire cleanses the curse of the land and leaves them a new land to live as liberated souls.
The final action of Scylla setting fire to the house is designed in such a way as to leave a message that their sufferings come to an end with their freedom. This can be compared with the words of Martin Luther King whose vision prophesied this freedom of today in his 1963 speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, (“I Have A Dream”) at the March on Washington.

When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and sing in the worlds of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, free at last: thank God Almighty, we are Free at last” (NA 83). (emphasis mine)

Dove’s vision also joins with Martin Luther King’s in pursuing freedom for the African American people. Dubois in The Souls of Black Folk writes “Shout, O children! / Shout, you’re free! / For God has bought your liberty!” She puts an end to the struggle in her play as a mark of forecasting today’s freedom and equality of her race in America. The whole play is a history of burial and expression though it deals with the traumas explaining adult neuroses. Her aim is to bring out more personal experiences and to continue to universalize those experiences often separated by race, gender, and class.

All new literatures celebrate the dignity of all characters irrespective of their race, colour, and creed. Dove condemns the institution of marriage. Louis is a representation of the male dominated world of imperialism, an example of aggressive extension of authority in the house. Louis, the husband of Amalia, devotes his whole life to the non-living things i.e., the stars, in upgrading his wit. He detaches himself from the world. His only botheration is about the stars
and their movements. It shows his lack of emotional involvement with Amalia’s life. There is no fulfillment in their married life. Dove portrays the modern life of absurdity and its meaninglessness in this play. Louis strives to achieve something which is not relevant to his life at all. Louis is always at the window of his study, peering through the telescope at the stars, showing his disassociation with the world of reality. He is away from home and his involvement there.

Amalia the mistress also suffers from a double consciousness as a slave of Louis and a woman. She is expected to be a submissive daughter, and an obedient wife. Louis separates her from her son immediately. She is helpless in the situation. Dove’s revision of *The Darker Face of the Earth* lifts the veil to provide insight into the inner lives of Amalia Jennings and Augustus Newcastle, who both are enslaved by outward perceptions while truly possessing “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; [and] two warring ideals in one dark body” (qtd in Sexton 778) says Du Bois. Dove brings not only the darker face of the African lives, but also the darker lives of the white women who are really suffering in the hands of the patriarchal society.

The mulatto Augustus was the product of the unification of both white and black through “the ivory gate” of Dove’s mental delivery. The depicted theme is not a sexual primal scene, although it is the result of a sexual episode obviously. Dove’s concerns lie not with sexual miscegenation intrinsically, but, instead, with the less tangible results of miscegenous amalgamation. The primal scene she needs to depict is the origin that explains her own amalgamated and cosmopolitan artistic identity, the birth of the cultural mulatto. Dove is a real cosmopolitan artist in creating such a hero blending with the Greek mythological theme to suite the endangered African American lives. This cultural mulatto creation proves its authenticity of individuality, self-assertion, positive outlook, and liberated self. Dove takes steps to bridge the
gap between the elite and the mass. She highlights the advocacy of characters who are capable of voicing their emotions and aspirations with their positive mode of living.

A short story is a literary composition that narrates episodes or events in a specific setting. These series of events are the product of the writers’ creativity and originality. They are the result of reflections and actualizations of the writer’s either during gloomy or happy days. Short stories are the outlet for the writer’s emotions. It is through short stories that a writer directly or indirectly expresses his thoughts, feelings and opinions regarding issues that continually connecting the society. Thus Dove’s short stories are written to inspire, to educate, to entertain and to prove her identity as an individual writer.

The eight short stories in the collection The Fifth Sunday are considered a short story sequence. They are “Fifth Sunday,” “The Zulus,” “The Spray Paint King,” “Second-Hand Man,” “Damon and Vandalia,” “The Vibraphone,” “Zabriah,” and “Aunt Carrie.” Among these “The Spray Paint King,” and “Zabriah,” are designed to focus individuals who are trying to be recognized as human beings in a world which groups them as stereotypes.

The first short story “Fifth Sunday” spreads realistic themes to cut through the passionate hopes of Valerie, the teenage protagonist, within the confines of an urban American black church. “Fifth Sunday” is the “title of the lead story and refers to those occasional months where there are five Sundays and it occurs “once in a blue moon” (Ingersoll 13). Pat Righelato in her “Geometry and Music: Rita Dove’s ‘Fifth Sunday’” says that Rita Dove’s “interest in the possibilities for individual expression of spirit within very socially prescriptive worlds unites the stories thematically: their variety of form is an index of the diversity of that expression” (URL 62). Dove herself reported about her eight short stories which “feature individuals who are trying to be recognized as human beings in a world that lives to pigeonhole and forget” (FS 165). Her
interest in the possibilities for individual expression of spirit within socially very prescriptive worlds unites the stories thematically: their variety of form is an index of the diversity of that expression.” (Righelato URL)

“The Spray Paint King” is an example of Dove’s merging of culture and art, where Dove creates a young black cultural mulatto artist. The mixed cultural influences, racial associations, and problems of identification distinguish Dove as a New Black Aesthetic writer. “A down home German girl” (FS 14) interviews the spray paint king about his interest in painting. According to Dove, the spray paint king was an adolescent male, a “brown baby” (Ingersoll 13) growing up in Cologne, one of the most magnificent river cities in Europe and an important centre for art which inspired Dove in her own trip to Europe and West Germany. The Government wanted to remove all the spray painting from the pristine walls of several public buildings, though many of them were artistically exciting; it created a friction between the artists and society. For Dove, it is the “friction between individual artistic protest and social regulations that prompted that story” (Ingersoll 13) because no picture was indecent but many of them were artistically stimulating. The young artist’s inheritance and his repressed feelings are expressed in “The Spray Paint King.” The artist is a cultural mulatto persona of black and German origin who was a graffiti artist writing in a youth detention center in Cologne at the bidding of his psychiatrist Dr. Severin. He used the colour black with racial identity. But his blackness was “undiluted” even due to his work when he was ten years old.

All that coal dust I had inhaled every winter, all the tenements dulled with soot and the chilling rain and the sky like an iron glove, all that dusty and gingery despair settling on the skin like grit–blackness undiluted, one hundred percent…then something broke inside me and splattered against the wall of coal.
Now I’m going to die, I thought, watching it grow translucent, darken to a gray jelly. *(FS 16)*

Dove as a cosmopolitan and a cultural mulatto could not stand the discrimination of race and narrow-mindedness of the white people which she registers in this story. Blackness is covered by the sea-green, the official colour of the bridge, which represents society and history’s cover-up of the men’s deaths and lives “the black of metal before it is painted sea green and the black of sea green metal against the sun, an unfinished web” *(FS 22)*. The hero painted the picture of the Madonna on the stanchion of the Severin Bridge to show his artistic talent and to highlight his salutation to the five men who died during the construction of that building. He further declares that

Oh citizens who have forgotten, I was there to remind you, I put the stain back on the wall—no outraged slogan, no incoherent declaration of love, but a gesture both graceful and treacherous, a free fall ending in disaster—among the urgent scrawls of history, a mere flick of the wrist. *(FS 22)*

The people have a feeling that “their walls are clean,” *(FS 22)* but it indirectly tells the story of the “stain of emphasizing production over human connection, the stain of repressing the worker’s death” *(Brown 29)*. He fulfills the desires of the dead persons to find a wall to proclaim their story to the world. Dove aims to bring out the treacherous limitations of Germany to bury their past deep at the cost of the black people. Though the walls are white and clean, there is an underlying message in the paintings to express the sacrifice of the black people. Dove brings out the growth of character at the end of the story. Dove is optimistic in using any culture and its substance in her works. “The Spray Paint King” is an example of Dove’s merging of German
culture and art, with a young black cultural mulatto artist. The mixed cultural influences, racial associations, and problems of identification distinguish Dove as a New Black Aesthetic writer.

Zabriah, a passionate and incorruptible woman “who looks like a man, a black woman with lint in her nappy hair and a shoe in her hand, a woman built like a pissoir, squat and round” (FS 54) in her appearance enters the shopping mall Euclid Arcade, to spoil the poetry meeting of the whites. She is very bold, going to the other end of the arcade. Zabriah knows German, and Russian. Zabriah “knows where she is going, let someone stop her if they can, all the way down, clack of a heel and thump of a sock, to the other end of the arcade” (FS 55). When she opened the door, the suited lady reads the poem “Black milk,” “of death we drink you careful,” Zabriah bursts out and asks “Is this the Poetry Circle?” (56). When she receives the answer, she slams her shoe on the table boldly to report that “well, I paid my annual dues last December and never heard nothing from you people who’s in charge here?” (56). She inquires authoritatively whether they know German and she proudly announces that she knows “German and Russian” (FS 56) too.

She intervenes while Carmichael reads her poem, and she puts fire into the poem of Mrs. Carmichael saying “this ain’t the buggy age. Spaceship two thousand one, put five million on it. Bitch. Got it? Helicopters” (FS 57). She refuses to be thrown out of the mall. She proves her pride. No one in the arcade has the guts to say a word against the bag lady though she spoils the entire poetry meet and involves herself in an act of despair. At last she slams the door again and goes out. Dove in the interview with Earl G. Ingersoll confesses that “Zabriah is a rhapsody (heroic poem) or aria” (13). This mulatto character has the ability to check white people and treat them as her equals. There is no fear in her approach to the poetry meeting. Her pride in knowing German and Russian languages gives her the strength to check the white world without hesitation.
and to criticize them for their abusive language. No one has the guts to say a word against this manly woman. When her turn comes, she reads out her poem. Matt praises her: “what a marvelous voice that is, it reminds me of the great gospel singer” (FS 58). Mahalia Jackson, the African American gospel singer, known for his powerful voice, is the “Queen of Gospel” and the civil rights activist. There is a comparison between the civil rights activist and Zabariah. Zabriah is notable for being an incredibly strong female character. They are willing to take any matter into their hands. They are not overthrown by the problems on their way as cultural mulattos.

Dove’s portrayals of women are very positive and move upward. Virginia, the heroine of Through the Ivory Gate, is the person to whom Aunt Carries confesses her sins as though she is the right person to ponder over the past. As a cultural mulatto personality, she forgives Aunt Carrie willingly. The woman representations are not scratching their wounds. The characters are highly adjustable, admirable, and lovable.

Dove builds on a series of verbal signs, images, and symbols, adding up to a subject matter which, at its simple level, refers to the most frequent activity in the story, while the theme of freedom or independent nature of women emerges as a recurrent commentary, either straightforward or imagistic. All stories are built on the theme of individualism. The short story collection elaborates the “growing up in middle America and coming in terms with a range of life’s twist’s and tests, first loves and betrayals, forgiveness, dark memories of marginalization, and exposure to as well as gleeful encounters with the arts” (Pereira, Rita 110). All the stories, however, feature “individuals who are trying to be recognized as human beings in a world that loves to pigeonhole and forget” (Ingersoll 13).

Each short story is unique with a mosaic of multi colored, multi textured pieces. Dove has created a situation to make up the complicated lives of each of the individuals, a base that
unites all of them under one roof that lends meaning to the stories. Each character is presented with a different view of life, each with her own experiences, and each with a different property that leads to different places with their individualism. Dove’s characters are strong in their mental ability, attractive in their physique, intelligent, and humane in their approach. Most writers follow the set conventions and style of writing set by the former writers, but Dove breaks through such set conventions. The innovative short stories are called avant-garde, experimental, or unconventional short fiction. There is an innovative aspect in each story and we see its development at the end of it. They deal with individuals who are in some way discovering either the complexity of their identities or the illusory nature of personal identity itself. Whatever differences there are in their overt subject matter, the stories are connected in raising philosophical issues that have long been deeply important to Dove.

Greek mythology and tragedy have proved another fertile source for Dove’s work. Wishing to cross boundaries of genre as well as culture and geography, Dove wrote the play *The Darker Face of the Earth* in blank verse. It is a play of protest against the universe, on behalf of the African Americans protest to get their equal share of freedom, their right to have an original identity of their own. The central character, being a mulatto, is striving to get the universal appeal to have social concern, and awareness about his plight in living in his own country. This play features the black people representing complex human emotions and yearnings. The play explores the familial dynamics of sexual relationships between slaves and slave owners, prevalent throughout the South although technically forbidden. As in the works of Toni Morrison, the themes of Greek tragedy translate and transform themselves to illuminate African American history.
Dove is very bold to punish the inhuman behaviour of Louis by murdering him at the end. George Ryga, the Canadian writer, and the contemporary of Dove, made the central character Rita, of the play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* as the victim of the white imperialism. Dove has never slaughtered her characters to be victims. They teach the white people a lesson at the end of all works. She is for a positive mode of life. Ryga’s Rita Joe lost all her identity, the glorious roles of a daughter, wife, mother, woman, and a grandmother. She was accused of spoiling the whole civilization by her unclean dress and other attitudes. No one liked her appearance. She was taken to be punished. If there was any escape from the judiciary, the murderers were waiting to kill her. At last she was raped and killed. Though Rita’s sufferings, her passivity, and sense of spiritual homelessness attain universal dimensions, there is place for protest to get freedom, and liberty. But Dove’s heroine Virginia is very bold, admired by others, very optimistic, has a goal in life, teaching the young generations of her country to be updated, an intelligent and smart character. Dove connects present moments with flashbacks of life which are painful recollections of her girlhood to give her a reminder to go higher and higher to show her eligibility. Even the heroines of Walker and Morrison are very unskilled, weak, and do not come out of their shell. Dove’s heroine overcomes the limits of gender conventions in fiction.

African Americans had struggled to make their lives as meaningful as the Americans’ but failed miserably due to racial problems. But Dove makes her heroine Virginia live a meaningful life with a vision and passion. Though the lives of African Americans are often constricted, Virginia dreams of a life which is purely independent. Virginia’s progress is toward a state of independence, to secure a place in the world as a universal artist. Augustus is the mulatto hero of the verse play. “The Spray Paint King” is an example for her mulatto performance. The integrated cultural impacts, racial relationships, black identity, and new black aesthetic are the
crux of this story. Dove merges her cultural association and art in her short story about a young black painter. Dove, the mother of a racially mixed child (Aviva) raises cultural mulatto characters in all these walks to celebrate a cosmopolitan identity in them, as a mark of her singularity, distinctiveness, and universality. Dove follows optimism, forgets the past which is irrelevant, and lives the present moment with her varied characters.

“Cosmopolitanism is both a moral and a political project ... contains two adjoined, yet unique, elements when examining questions of universal human worth, global cohabitation, and what duties we have to those beyond our borders” (Brown 2). As a mulatto Dove has proved her individuality in her African American identity in a multicultural society. She was the poet laureate for two years, a real recognition from the mainstream culture. She becomes the living model for all African American woman writers and common folk to achieve greatness in their own identity without grumbling over their former plight of slavery and oppression. Individuals should come out of their colonized self to taste their real freedom. But everyone accepts his suppression as a mark of slavery, and can’t easily leave that subjugation behind. Dove’s works stand testimony to her ability to move beyond her “racial self.”