CHAPTER III
DOVE’S TRADITIONAL APPROACH IN FICTION, SHORT FICTION, AND DRAMA

I began to understand that history isn’t merely facts and isolated events to be memorized, but that it is lived through people. Trying to fit my own history, and the history of my race and gender, into the Grand Chronicle—History with a capital H—led me to the realization that the underside of History, as it were, was infinitely more interesting. So in my work I make a conscious effort to treat History and history equally. (Ingersoll 126)

With the Harlem Renaissance African American literary tradition celebrated the “artistic self-assertion” of the writers and their “black heritage and aesthetic” with their new tradition of “African American modifications of American language” (Jones 9). Every literature is influenced by the folklore and oral literary models of its country. “All literatures have an essential literary tradition in oral, whether it is visible or invisible in the text” (3) says Gayl Jones in Liberating Voices. A few writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Rudolph Fisher created a new canon of African American tradition in writing African American fiction. Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Willis Richardson set their distinct models in writing African American plays. “This shift in attitude made possible a new seriousness and range in subject matter, experiences, and concerns, as well as deeper, more complex characterizations” (Jones 9).

This kind of “seriousness” made the African American woman writers from 1920s to 1980s like Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker integrate “the traditional black female activities” to “express their own and their characters” with their use
of “women’s language and cultural experience in books by black women and about black women results in miraculously rich coalescing of form and content and also takes their writing far beyond the confines of white male literary structures” (164) says Barbara Smith in Toward a Black Feminist Criticism. Dove is particular about African American history for one simple reason that it is her “birthright,” and “genetic makeup.” She is “more receptive to the stories of people who’ve been sidelined by history.” History becomes part of her “heritage” and one of her “themes” too. Further she explains that she “had both the opportunity to watch from the sidelines,” and this is the reason for her to enter “into the mainstream and insist upon” her “presence” through her works. Though the former “is passive stance;” the latter is to be done “actively” (Dungy 1036). Dove continues her quest in all her works, since history is full of quest. This “historical context” is applied to bring out Rita Dove’s African tradition and her African rootedness in her fiction, short fiction, and play with her handling of content and form. Dove has highlighted the distinct identity of African American tradition through the historical experience of the African American people with content on the one hand, and her use of the traditional African American forms like work songs, spirituals, and blues, on the other hand.

History mirrors the continuum of events occurring in succession, leading from the past to the present and even into the future. History reflects all that is recorded or preserved in writing of the past events. It is the discipline that records and interprets past events involving human beings. There are African American pioneer writers who recorded African American history in their works: William Attaway’s Blood on the Forge (1941) traced the Great Migration from the South to the North after World War I, Chester Himes in If He Hollers Let Him Go (1945), sorted out the animosity of educated, northern-born whites as the African Americans struggled to work together in a Los Angeles shipyard at the height of World War II, and Morrison employed
narrative forms to express the African Americans’ dislocated, marginalized oral tradition, and culture, and to reclaim African American historical experiences. Dove also gained the capacity for further growth by her use of historical representation to establish her African American tradition in her works.

Dove in one of her interviews with Brazaitis says: “all of my beginning memories come out of my experiences in Akron… It’s not true to write about some place that doesn’t have that emotional resonance… Akron is my own” (qtd in Steffen 107). Since she has lived in the places, and undergone personal encounters in those places, her rootedness in the places made her write what is true and accurate. She has not only presented the real life of her own grandparents who lived in the early Twentieth Century as her example to revive personal history alive, but also has recorded the slave past of the plantation to review history with the classical myth and political history of the Haitian Revolution to strengthen her content. Dove’s verse play *The Darker Face of the Earth* re-tells the African American history of the plantation period.

A play is a serious, intense, or well plotted story that elicits emotion; traditionally performed on stage before an audience with a serious theme, plot, characters, dialogues, and actions. Dove’s play *The Darker Face of the Earth* was set in a Pre-Civil War Plantation near Charleston, South Carolina, to highlight the African Americans’ struggle for Independence. In 1996, the play was staged under the direction of Ricardo Khan at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The play progresses through oral performances, chants, oration, and decoding of a sign system. It is a verse play, blended with slave history, and the freedom of the slaves at the end of it.

According to Bada, *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” (105). There are African American tragedies which served as models for Dove: Amiri Baraka’s Slave Ship, Toni Morrison’s Beloved, and Charles Johnson’s Middle Passage. She combines history and mythology and her hero is a combination of white and black to prove her creative genius. As in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man which brought the recreation of mythologies and the indigenous oral tradition, Dove also used the classical Oedipus myth in her play. In bringing the historical context, Dove has employed the classical myth of Oedipus with the African American theme of slavery.

*The Darker Face of the Earth* deals with the oedipal conflict of incest and patricide with more attention to the problem of slavery and miscegenation. The oedipal relation is between the white plantation owner Amalia Louis and her mulatto son Augustus Newcastle, the son of Hector, who is the freed black slave of the plantation. In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus’ 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. The monarch Oedipus, a stranger to the city Thebes, married the widow of the former king as a reward for his unraveling the riddle of the murderous Sphinx some decades ago. Dove adapts Sophocles’ tragedy to suit the African American context by integrating both European myth and the dynamics of cultural cross fertilization by giving the cultural ethos of African American tradition. Dove has created a similar Oedipus figure Augustus, the son of the African slave Hector, through the union with his white owner and his childhood friend Amalia Jennings. Dove, as an African American writer, has fused this theme of oedipal taboo with the age old theme of American slavery and the miscegenation since the civil war period. Laius is replaced by Louis La Farge, Jocusta is replaced by Amalia Jennings La Farge, and the
Prophet Tiresias is replaced by the conjurer woman Scylla, who practises her voodooism too. The central character Augustus Newcastle was brought up by a white captain in Charleston. After his death, he was brought to the Jennings plantation as a slave.

Dove’s sole purpose in the play is to champion the black race with a new mode of values to proclaim her theme of struggle for freedom. This play was drafted in the late 1970s and Dove took nearly 20 years to complete it in 1994 as the first edition and a complete revised second edition was published in 1996. This long process itself shows the kind of struggle Dove has undergone in the publication of this play with its theme of struggle and finally achieving freedom as in her play (Pereira, *Rita* 185-87). The hero Augustus’ hard struggles to find freedom for the comrades from white oppression is central to this play. African American writers look into the theme of slavery and freedom with the view to reshape their slave history which was full of tragic continuities between antebellum slavery and post bellum freedom as slavery remained an insurmountable social evil. Dove establishes an African American struggle for freedom, “the pastness of the past” to connect with the present theme of African American struggles still in the present scenario. Dove’s *The Darker Face of the Earth* is surely in the tradition of Eliot’s “historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together” (Eliot 49) and the play pronounces “a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” (Eliot 49).

The foremost aim of Dove in bringing African American history through her play is to highlight the African American past during the pre-civil war, important happenings, customs, culture, and their beliefs. The lives of ordinary people are given importance since they are included in history. Each character becomes part of the play though apparently they are mythical representations, fighting hard to prove their existence. The personal emotions, feelings and
identities of the characters connect the play with African American history. Dove brought history from 1619 as to how the slaves came to Jamestown, USA, in chains in sailing vessels. The hero Augustus Newcastle was brought to the Jennings Plantation in chains. The hero is on a quest to [re]search his roots, family, identity, and his existence. After the 1970s, like other African American writers, Dove has also recorded the slave historical past in order to reclaim the lost or stolen past.

This play gives evidences of the experiences of the slaves. Dove declares in her prose *Poet’s World* that the play reflects the “voyage back into the darker phase of slave history where—despite close human contact the alienation between oppression and oppressed reaches cosmic dimensions” (15-16). The major contribution by Rita Dove lies in the highlighting of the dimensions of her protest to experience freedom from sufferings caused by slavery like dehumanization, gender oppressions, and inhuman treatment. “Dove collapses the cultural and racial categories embedded within the American reality of slavery, introducing, through style and plot, a transformative chaos which remains creatively open and unresolved at the end of the play” (Bada 105). This play deals with the lasting scars of personal, cultural and political sufferings of the African Americans in their own country. Dove is able to dispel many of the myths about Africa, and concretely depict the parallel struggles both Africans and African-Americans must face. Class tensions are a prominent issue throughout the play. Before the American Civil War, African American literature primarily focused on the issue of slavery.

The struggles of the slaves are neatly presented. The Prologue elaborates the birth of the nigger, and his displacement to Charleston because of his white father’s compulsion to get rid of the nigger child. The doctor consoled Louis La Farge, the husband of the white Mistress Amalia on seeing a nigger as his child “a fresh slave, New property” (43). The prologue details how the
nigger child was treated inhumanly with Louis slipping the spurs into the basket, in which the baby is sent to Charleston. Hector, the black father of the nigger child, is not informed of the baby that makes him go mad and live in the swamp as a victim of slavery. There are two victims in the prologue (Hector and the Baby) who were harmed physically, mentally, and psychologically.

In Act I we witness the struggles of the slaves and how the slaves were eagerly awaiting the Sabbath to rest themselves in peace. The narrator makes the chorus recite the story to the audience. The slaves work hard in the plantation, without minding their rest. The First Act opens in the cotton fields, where Diana becomes sick. Others help her saying, “Lift in your knees, Diana / try not to think about your blood. / Tomorrow’s Sunday- / tomorrow you can rest” (DFE 35). The slaves are very tired with their daily work in the cotton fields. Alexander, one of the slaves, expresses his exasperation: “I swear on all my years / there’s nothing I hate so much as cotton. / Picking, toting, weighing, tramping: / the work keeps coming” (DFE 62). The slaves are compelled to establish the American cotton production during the pre Civil War period.

The sexual exploitation of the white men was given through Amalia who pointed out Louis’s upper hand over the slave women. She rightly claimed that “It was your right / to pull on those riding boots / and stalk little slave girls” (DFE 21). During the antebellum period, the slaves were violated by the white people. Augustus explained his plight of slavery with a heavy heart to his plantation mistress Amalia in his poetic language.

One soft spring night

when the pear blossoms

cast their pale faces

on the darker face of the earth…
and the shame between his mama’s legs–

now he stands in the parlour of

another Massa, entertaining the pretty mistress

with stories of whippings and heartbreak. (*DFE 87*).

The African American people are ill-treated with derogatory expressions like “Destroy the bastard!” (*DFE 22*) and “as for the bastard child” (*DFE 29*). The people are treated as animals. Amalia also refers to the slaves as her “happy flock” (*DFE 76*). The baby was sent to “a family who handles / these… delicate matters. / they’ll raise him and arrange for sale / when it’s time” (*DFE 27*). The slaves are only animals to the white community. The African American slave past is revealed through Augustus’s reporting of the excruciating treatment given to Isaac, the preacher, who is caught for treachery. The men flog the traitor and heal him to flog him again and again continuously for four weeks. Isaac sees his wife “on the auction block with her baby “at her breast.” When his back is finally healed, his new owner takes him from the auction only to see his dead body (*DFE 85*). This is how the slaves were treated by the whites. Dove recorded these things carefully for the later generations.

When Hector was in a dejected mood, he engaged himself in killing all the snakes, those symbols of lust. He sang in the African way.

I’m gonna catch all the snakes in the swamp.

They grow and grow, so many of them.

But I’ll kill them! I’ll kill them all. (*DFE 53*)

The old order tries to remove those slavish attitudes. However Hector tries, but he fails miserably. He finds the snakes almost every day. Augustus, the new energy joins this old man after twenty years to set right everything in the plantation. Two generations of men are
represented in the play. Hector who belongs to the pre-Civil war period is subservient, submissive and subordinate, and passive whereas Augustus belonging to the postbellum period is bold, courageous, and educated to oppose the evil forces effectively. Dove slowly brings out the development of the plight of African American people. The character Augustus is an example of slave uprising. This was a clear vision of many African Americans of freedom.

There is reference to Augustus’ scars as “they couldn’t come from a whipping. / They’re more like–more like / markings that turn up in fairy tales / of princes and paupers exchanged at birth” (DFE 121). There are wounds of slavery of the past which may never be healed. Augustus confessed that the scars on his shoulders were permanent from his childhood without his knowledge, the remains of the age old problem of slavery. Dove specifically shows the symbol of scars, to be only a mark and not a wound with scab on it. Amalia wanted to know the reason for the scars of Augustus.

Your back is like a book

No-one can bear to read to the end –

Each angry gash, each proud welt…

But these scars on your side are different. (DFE 121)

Amalia maintained the class distinction naturally. Her reference to Augustus that “a slave has no opinion” (DFE 79) is an example of the black people’s subordination. Though Augustus was Amalia’s darling, she did not allow him at any cost to give his opinion. Amalia’s statement gave the paradox of the American colonization on the black people. Later the black people turned against white superiority with their strong muscle power and slowly with their education.

Jones, the overseer cautioned Amalia about Augustus: “twenty-two acts of aggression and rebellion” (DFE 44). Again Jones stated the education of Augustus, “rumor has it he can
read and write” (DFE 44). No one knew the true character of Augustus until he reached the plantation. The white community had fears about the blacks getting educated because it would set right the entire barrier between white and black mass.

The Black people’s nomadism is very clearly depicted through Phebe’s conversation with Augustus to highlight her plight of homelessness. She regretted that “much as any of us got a home on this earth” (DFE 95). There is grief and bitter isolation as they didn’t have a home of their own, real supporters of their own, and no identity of their own. This tendency to form a sense of home in a place where they shed their sweat for the upliftment of the American economy is natural. Dove has recorded faithfully the nuances of black life and its frustrations during the pre-civil war period. Phebe, the real mate of Augustus, was a woman of strong will and genuine love who was not given a chance to live happily due to her slavery. She was stable when compared to both Amalia and Augustus. Phebe’s commentary on the events which happened at the big white house (a representation of white imperialism) that Hector (the black man) was aspiring for something which was beyond his imagination to be the father of a child (from a white mother). She laughed at her own wit and sang: “stepped on a pin, the pin bent, / and that’s the way the story went” (DFE 17). She prophesied jokingly how the story ended. Augustus’s birth brought a curse as in the case of Oedipus. The peace of the white house was destroyed, inclusive of the slave quarters and harmful spirits were released upon the world. Dove uses “the white house” as her symbol. The white house may refer to the “white house” of the American Presidents.

Another important problem of African Americans is their familial estrangement and alienation. After learning of the death of his child, Hector lives only in the swamp to kill all snakes to appease his inner pain. There is no social status and there is no legitimized inheritance
of citizenship for Hector. In the same way, Augustus is separated from his mother. The psychological sufferings of Hector without knowing anything about his new born child lead him to an ecstatic state. He loses his life. This is the case of many African Americans in the United States of America during the pre civil war period.

Augustus’ sins are due to the custom of slavery. It is slavery which pricked Augustus’ integrity to think of killing Hector and Amalia. Hector has his incestuous relation with his own mother, because he is not given the identity of his birth, his parents, or his birth place. His was not a very intimate relationship but it was a kind of submissiveness for a chance of luck to have contact with a white plantation mistress. This relation had never given him any kind of happiness or pleasure in his heart of hearts in the beginning.

The play takes the problem of the inability of succeeding generations of Africans to respond to the tragedy of Hector. At the end of the play, the protagonist killed his own father Hector because he came to know of the conspiracy and his threatening words to inform Amalia; falling in love with his own mother Amalia, killing his own white father Louis, and attempted patricide. Steffen says that “The brutal system of slavery traps both Amalia and Augustus as they play out their fateful love against a vast, bloody slave uprising”. As a leader of the conspirators, he could not allow his mother to escape from persecution, 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. Augustus releases the curse on the land by killing all the three: Louis, Hector, and Amalia, the triangular force.

The hero gave a powerful speech to create awareness among the illiterate and ignorant slaves. He elaborated on the history of the Haiti revolution and how the slaves were shouting
three words: “Liberte!” (we shall be free), “Egalite!” (equality between master and slave), and “Fraternite!” (brotherhood) (DFE 75). A similar treatment of voodoo and life in Haiti and Jamaica is presented by Zora Neale Hurston in her Tell My Horse, wherein she focuses her personal experiences in Haiti and Jamaica to portray the ceremonies and customs and superstitions. Augustus prepares the people for such a revolution with his art of speaking.

They came down the mountains
to the sound of tambourines and conch shells.
With torches they swept onto the plantations,
with the long harvest knives
they chopped white men down
like sugar cane. For three weeks
the flames raged; then the sun
broke through the smoke and shone
upon a new nation, a black nation –
Haiti! (DFE 75)

Dove calls Augustus “warrior of righteousness” who strove hard to get freedom for the black people. It is applicable to any black hero who would like to bring freedom to his race.

“New Moon, skies clear.
The wheel’s stopped turning:
Redemption’s here” (DFE 127).

“To night’s new moon; skies are clear.,
Destiny calls!” (DFE 128).
“The nights’ perfect:

Clear skies, new moon” (DFE 131).

The words “new moon,” “clear skies,” and “Redemption’s here” are her optimistic view of her new hope in their plight of slavery. The conspirators become the voice of the voiceless. They fight for their cause and take revenge for the injustice meted out to their people. So they involve themselves in violence to proclaim to the world that they are also the sons of the soil. Their fight is against the racial society.

Dove makes a reference to the Haitian revolution in her play to bring out the “historical objects and events that seem to augur a new order of society” (Baker, The Journey 133). Amalia also gave her witness about the Haitian revolution and how the French plantation owners fled to America ending in the Charleston harbor. And “It was a brilliant revolution” (DFE 82). The African cultural past is also presented. When Hector dies, he calls his Yoruba God “Eshu Elegba ogo gbogbo” (DFE 150). Eshu Elegba is the God who represents the luminal divinity of transition between the world of the living and the dead. Dove brings her ancestral tradition of Africa specifically to show her rootedness in African culture. Eshu, also known as Elegba or Legba, is a trickster god of the Yoruba people of Nigeria in West Africa. He is unpredictable, sly, and fond of pranks that can be cruel and disruptive. Eshu, who knows all the languages spoken on earth, serves as a messenger between the gods and the people. He also carries up to heaven the sacrifices that people offer the gods.

Dove brings the African culture of worshiping their Elegba as to show their African culture. Augustus, the child of the plantation mistress and one of the plantation slaves, is displaced at birth and sent to Charleston. Twenty years later, he returns to the plantation as an educated nigger. The plantation to which he returns is under a “double affliction: The public
scourge of slavery is duplicated in a private curse whose cause lies shrouded in mystery” (Carlisle URL). Like Oedipus, Augustus is a charismatic leader, viewed by his people as a redeemer of the people like Moses. Dove destabilizes the traditional notion of myth through which she would like to bring a new order of African American establishment.

“While Oedipus outwits the Sphinx, meeting the mysterious and nonrational powers of her curse with a direct and rational answer to the riddles, Augustus cuts through the superstitions and fears of his people with the scorn of clearheaded logic” (Carlisle URL). He ignores the Christian believers and their “Sunday shout” with contempt:

“Listen
to them sing!

What kind of god preaches such misery? (*DFE 58*).

And he gives an equally short shrift to the cryptic warnings and cant of Scylla, the “voodoo woman”:

Women like her, hah!
They get a chill one morning,
Hear an owl or two, and snap!-
they've received their “powers”!
Then they collect a few old bones,
Dry some herbs, and they’re in business. (*DFE 60*)

In the words of Theodora Carlisle, Dove “moves from the language of the European classic, substituting and reorganizing its elements, employing the African American vernacular trope of capping” (Carlisle URL). This is explained clearly by Henry Louis Gates Jr., “the black [Idots] equivalent of metalepsis, the rhetorical trope” (*Signifying* 87). Hurston used metalepsis
(substituting metonymy of one figurative sense for another) in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the trope of capping (metalepsis) and inverts her effect of creating an invisible writing that speaks, by creating an invisible speaking voice. Dove’s adaptation of this metalepsis “aims at reintegrating a sacred, canonical, or centrally significant text into the present time, at reformulating it so that it can still be seen as valid by a new generation” (qtd in Carlisle URL) says Elinor Shaffer.

She follows her African American tradition in combining her ideas with Biblical references.

“who is not with us / is against us. (*DFE* 69) [Idots]

“Gird your loins with vengeance, /

Strap on the shining sword of freedom!” (*DFE* 71)

So the one becomes many

And the many, one. (*DFE* 69)

Patience, my son! Patience and cunning.

Sow discontent among your brethren,

inspire them to fury. (*DFE* 71)

Whoever steals a man,” He says,

“whether he sells him or

is found in possession of him shall be put to death.” (*DFE* 69)
Oral tradition comprises the specialized verbal art forms proverbs, riddles, chants, lyric poetry, tales, myths, legends, and epics through which African societies have ensured cultural continuity. It is the repository of a community's core values, philosophies, mysteries, rituals, and, most importantly, memory. It survives by virtue of transmission from one generation to another by word of mouth. Performance is its most important distinguishing feature. It exists only in its moment of actuation, when performer and audience come together in a quasi-spiritual engagement. The performer draws his or her materials from the collective ancestral role familiar to the audience; distinctiveness comes with innovation and inventiveness, and delivery of language.

Folklore, once part of American literature, (folk motives in the works of Henry James), came to an end with the birth of Harlem Renaissance. “During the Harlem Renaissance, then, folklore or oral tradition was no longer quaint and restrictive, but as the ore for complex literary influence” so that “this new attitude provided the base for contemporary African American writers, who make use of folklore cognizant of its multiple and complex linguistic, social, historical, intellectual, and political functions” (Jones 9). It was Dunbar who brought the plantation tradition into his poetry with his dialect. Dunbar captivated “the communal love, humor, strength, and devotion that unite black people” (Jones 18) in his poetry whereas Dove has captivated these in her play. Hughes broke this dialectical use to the Standard English as poetic models “to maintain a sense of the syntax, vocabulary, imagery, metaphors, and expressive rhythms of a different vernacular and linguistic tradition, but not with the caricature” (Jones 24).

It was Hughes who introduced oral tradition and folklore in his poems with spirituals and blues as African American oral genres. Folktales contain a vast storehouse of stories—songs, dances, styles of worship, games, and patterns of adornment. These stories were not intended for
print but for spoken performances, full of whispery asides, silences, dramatic clicks, calls, and other story sounds to reinforce the rhetorical self-consciousness of the slave narrative by incorporating into their stories trickster motifs from African American folk culture. Black folklore contains music, religious experiences, and spirituals with their instinctive feelings and incomparable sense of rhythm to pour out their pent up emotions. Folklore is mainly focused on dancing and singing, emphasizing the rhythms and musicality. Black folk poetry and music are linked together and it is the signal unit of black people. The blues and jazz are the new forms of Negro folksong. It is used both at work place and one’s own house. The story telling tradition of the African Americans has been followed by the white Americans too.

African American literature has its roots in the oral traditions of African slaves in America. The slaves used stories and fables in much the same way as they used music. These stories influenced the earliest African American writers and poets in the eighteenth century and continued to influence the modern writers too. African Americans’ singing, story-telling, re-creating or imitating gave birth to oral forms. Baker is of the view that “the field of the black cultural performance is public interaction; and its mode is song or chant. The tenor is communal—a voice addressing an entire group in ceremonial ways. The writer thus becomes an active tradition bearer, rather than passive craftsman pursuing meaning alone in the workshop” (The Journey 128).

The oral aspect and “I” become an integral part of Dove’s works. Dove’s play is filled with songs which are the base of the dramatic structure, and narrative voicings with explicit character development, plot development, and theme development. The narration, dramatic structure, and presentations of character in Dove’s The Darker Face of the Earth are the evidences of oral tradition. Baker in The Journey Back is of the view that “the field of the black
cultural performance is public interaction; and its mode is song or chant. The tenor is communal—a voice addressing an entire group in ceremonial ways” so that “the writer becomes an active tradition bearer, rather than passive craftsman pursuing meaning alone in the workshop” (128).

The play *The Darker Face of the Earth* narrates the generations of struggle of the blacks. The whole story is a blending of African American history with the history of their folk music. The scenes in the slave quarters are given outlet in the spirituals since the spirituals are born as an outlet for their sorrows. Augustus gave tribute to Hector’s dead body, when he happened to kill him unwillingly:

Let these vines be your shroud,

this moss a pillow for your head.

These roots will be your coffin,

this dark water your grave. (*DFE* 120)

“In Storytelling, the oral tradition reinforces complements, and acts on the reality” (Jones 105).

Dove’s dialogue throughout the play has the dynamics of the spoken language to insist on oral tradition. The conspirators exchange their secret language with their fellow comrades with songs. The most popular Spirituals hint at the Underground Railroad (a movement to help the slave escape to the Northern cities):

Steal away, steal away,

Steal away to Jesus!

Steal away home,

I ain’t got long to stay here. (*DFE* 72)

This is a famous spirituals and is used as a signal song for the runaway slaves, giving caution to be beware of the white supporters of slavery. Augustus could be compared to the Biblical Moses
for Moses was also the redeemer of his people “Go Down Moses” was a favourite spirituals among the slaves and in one of the lines they subtly express that God’s voice is heard saying “Let My People Go” or “I would smite your first born dead…” When carrying the dead body of Hector, the slaves were singing a version of an early African American Spiritual.

Oh Deat’ him is a little man,
And him goes from do’ to do’,
Him kill some souls and him cripple up,
And him’ some souls to pray.
Do Lord, remember me,
Do Lord, remember me.
I cry to the Lord as de year roll aroun’
Lord, remember me. (*DFE 127*)

In this funeral, the slaves sang the cycles of birth and death which indeed enfolded and absorbed the pains of life. In this particular instance, the distinctly non-European customs and musical elements both emphasize and honor the community’s African roots.

Blues emerged from African American oral tradition and the musical tradition. The themes are struggle, despair, and sex. A statement is made in the first line, a variation in the second line, and an alternate is declared in the third line. Scylla referred to the isolated condition of Augustus with African American Blues pattern. These lines are set to be in African American traditional singing of blues. When the slaves are singing, they follow the blues pattern.

He came with no mother to soothe him.
He came with no father to teach him.
He came with no names for his gods. (*DFE 127*)
The slaves were meek and subservient in the beginning of Act I while the second Act confirms how the slaves were infuriated by Augustus and sang their slave songs with a real sense:

They have bowed our heads,

They have bent our backs.

Mercy, mercy,

Lord above, mercy. (*DFE* 89)

Work songs of slavery and freedom are sung to pass time, and to reflect on the scene the workers witnessed. It is a kind of energizer to double their energy. These work songs are closely connected with a specific form of work. They were developed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries as part of the oral culture in the call-and-response pattern, where a leader would sing a verse or verses and the others would respond with a chorus. This came from the African tradition of agricultural work song and found its way into the spirituals and gospel music. They give the story of how African Americans have managed to survive and to prevail.

No way out, gotta keep on –

No way but to see it through (*DFE* 61)

Baker Jr., states that “slave narratives offer the text as a world, as a system of signs. The black writer is the point of consciousness of his language. If he does embody a “Black Aesthetic,” then it can be measured not by “content,” but by a complex structure of meanings” (*Baker Preface* 254). Throughout the play Dove incorporates the slave songs, important rites, and rituals in between slaves and masters, and the education of slaves. The slaves used code words to lead the conspiracy as “May Fate be with You” (130). When the whole of conspiracy is about to be executed, they had the hope of winning the battle. The conspirators used the following expressions: “new Moon, skies clear. / The wheel’s stopped turning: / Redemption’s here” (127).
Call and response is a poetic structure in the folk seculars originating from West African music. It preserves the subtlety of the feelings and emotions of the individuals in communicating their spirit in the form of call and response. The leader may sing the first line and the chorus repeat the same at regular intervals. It’s a natural process of their originality and inner demeanor. The respondent and the leader form the team with the chorus. The AB pattern / AAB pattern are used. Sometimes the first line is repeated twice by the leader followed by a third line by the chorus. The oral language has immediate effect when it is heard with tone modulations and stress on words. But in the printed format, the nuance of the language is missing, in spite of the punctuation marks and other explanations to bring out the significance of the particular situations. So the African Americans in the past reinforced the importance of oral literature. Nowadays, though the oral forms are not very popular due its nonexistence, it occupies a greater place in the form of songs with music and other forms of dramatic devices.

African American writing is always noted for its syncopation, which is a mark of their uniqueness. When Scylla was in her trance, she identified the curse which settled over the land.

    bad times a-coming. Bad times
    coming over the hill on mighty horses,

    .............................................

    Like a thin black net
    the curse settle over the land. (DFE 38)

Dove is very clear in her comparison of “curse” to “slavery” which is responsible for the destruction of many lives: death of Amalia, the white plantation Mistress; Louis, her white husband; and Hector, the black lover of Amalia. When Scylla was in trance she talked her Yoruba language too. Scylla recreated the rituals of the Yoruba spiritual tradition, and Scylla
provided a link for the slaves to their African roots. While Scylla herself has no command over an African language, she regularly weaves Yoruba words and phrases into her magical spell. It was Hector who came from Africa, as a child. And “although Hector himself has only a distant memory of the original homeland, he provides Scylla with an authentic connection” and it was in Hector’s funeral scene where “Scylla’s authority becomes most clearly manifest and, moreover, where the power of an Africanist vision and sensibility is revealed most clearly” (Carlisle URL).

Eshu Elewa ogo gbogbo…

…oki kosi eyo!

Kosi eyo,

Kosi iku…

…. 

Kosi ano!

Ni oru ko mi gbogbo

omonile fu kuikuo

modupwe –

baba mi Elewa! (DFE 56)

Story telling is part and parcel of African American writing. In the play, Scipio also told the age old slave story.

The possum said, don’t hurt me,

I’m harmless if you please!

The nigger said, I am harmless, too.

And got down on his knees.

.................................
You’re just as black as me. Coon said,

but your tail ain’t quite so long!

The Mr Coon ran in the woods

And wouldn’t join their song. (DFE 49)

“Dove’s essential power as a lyric poet enables her to create a dramatic text equally governed by the power of the unforgettable line and image” (AAWCT 332). Her creativity is reflected in each and every page. Augustus’s dialogue is always special with poetry, syncopation, and intellect: “sure is a fine night.” (DFE 58) “Fear! Fear eats out the heart. / It’ll cause kings and field niggers alike / to crawl in their own piss. Listen / to them sing!” (DFE 58) “White fearing niggers / death fearing slaves” (DFE 58). The heart breaking sorrow of Amalia is also revealed in rhythmic language: “Half my life I spent dreaming, / the other half burying dreams” (86). When Amalia had to send the child, she burst out with her motherly affections: “I dreamed you before you came, / now I must remember you before you go” (DFE 32).

Dialogue provides the substance of a play. Each word uttered by the central character furthers the establishment of the play, contributes to its effect as a whole. Therefore, a sense of decorum must be established by the other characters. Also the exposition of the play often falls on the dialogue of the main characters such as Augustus, Amalia, Scylla, and Diana. Exposition establishes the relationships, tensions or conflicts from which later plot developments derive. Minor characters played an important role in providing information and guiding interpretation. Minor characters casually commented among themselves on major characters and plot development. Extended soliloquy enables the major character to reveal his thoughts in much greater detail than in natural dialogue. Flashbacks often substitute for narration. Many contemporary playwrights have abandoned recognizable setting, chronological sequence and
characterization. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, realistic depiction of everyday life entered the genre of drama, whereas the characters may be unconventional and their thoughts turbulent and fantasy-ridden. Experimentation seems to be the key word in this play.

African American culture in the United States refers to the cultural contributions of Americans of African descent to the culture of the United States, either as part of or distinct from American culture. The distinct identity of African American culture is rooted in the historical experience of the African-American people, including the Middle Passage. The culture is both distinct and enormously influential to the American culture as a whole in Dove’s work. African-American culture is rooted in Africa. There are some facets of African American culture that were accentuated by the slavery period. The result is a unique and dynamic culture that has had and continues to have a profound impact on mainstream American culture, as well as the culture of the broader world. There is a strong sense of blackness throughout the play. Unlike many of her black contemporaries, Dove grew up in a family that was well aware of its African heritage, and embraced its roots. The play mainly concentrates on the protest or resistance against repressiveness over white imperialism, which is a substantial aspect of African American writing.

Kimberley Louis Phillips expands Eliot’s definition of tradition in Dove’s *The Darker Face of the Earth*.

If we expand Eliot’s definition of tradition across cultures and continents, we can say that Rita Dove is a “traditional” writer since the “historical sense compels [her] to write not merely with [her]own generation in [her]bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the
whole of the literature of [her] own country [and the whole of the Black Diasporic culture, oral and Written] has a simultaneous order” (49). (112)

Black aesthetic communicates the complexities of African American culture and tradition. In “In Our Own Time: The Florescence of Nationalism in the Sixties and Seventies” Baker says that “African life, black American culture, and black men and women in society contain values that must be preserved, fostered, and communicated. The result of their labors has been the kind of resistance to white definitions... for the black writers, to bring unique fields of meaning and value” (The Journey 121-122). African American culture is revealed through many occurrences, in the play and in the novel Through the Ivory Gate.

African American novels emerged in the course of the nineteenth century during the 1920s. Later in the 1970s, African American novels became a genre of expression of contemporary life and tradition. There are different types of fiction such as historical, crime and detective, inspirational, romances and speculative. African American readers want their works to validate the complexity of their lives. The new readers want to have an enhanced black consciousness in whatever they write about their people, and characters, try to seek their black identity as an elucidation of their difficulties, and to have a concrete perception to endow them to endure and improve their everyday living.

The novel Through the Ivory Gate is a semi-autobiographical experimental narrative about the transcultural identity formation of the young black middle-class woman Virginia King. The novel primarily shows an authentic account of African American interest in music, African American culture, transcultural middle class values, and the African American identity. This novel is most significantly and meaningfully read and appreciated as an African American ‘metafiction.’
Virginia King springs up as a successful heroine from her childhood to adulthood in the novel. At an early stage, a loss or some sort of discontent pushes her away from home or the family setting, providing a drift to begin a journey. Dove always emphasizes journey motifs to find the truth. It is sometimes the psychological journey to realize her ‘self.’ Her sincerity in attempting a social cause is coupled with loyalty and greatness in its ability to draw upon a rich variety of cultural traditions and amalgamate them into a vision of African American life which is both coherent and resonant. The main character often develops through self actualization. The process of maturation is long, energetic and step-by-step, involving repeated encounters between the protagonist’s impoverishments and inclinations and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order.

Virginia, a puppeteer as an Artist-in-the-Schools, was drawn first to music and studied the cello in college in Wisconsin; she became a drama major (courageously insisting on her right to study mime); but when she had difficulty in finding roles for black women, she joined an experimental puppet troupe. After the prologue, she lives in Akron with her puppets. In her novel, Dove explores black identity; intra-racial relation; class bias; and personal relationship; family relationship; sense of community and belongingness; and value of love and loyalty. Dove proclaims to the world her acceptance of black identity through the character Virginia.

Contemporary forces that shape the dynamic of the modern African American family include their migration to urban places during the twentieth century, to the Northeast, urban Midwest cities to find jobs, a shift from a cohesive community to a state of relative anonymity. This is given clearly in the novel *Through the Ivory Gate*. Virginia the central character of the novel says that “we move to Arizona when I was in fourth grade” and “we had moved from Pittsburgh to Akron when I was twelve” (*IG* 18). The African American neighborhood is
described in the first chapter. Virginia recalls the neighborhood “of her assigned school district, a footlocker full of puppets in the trunk of the Plymouth and a cello on the back seat” and the streets of her childhood connected with “backyards and maple trees and lawn sprinklers of the Midwest, were as scraggly as her eyes took them to be” (*IG* 11).

Her memory gives us the details of African American families, their cultural movement, their extended family units, and marriages. This is partially Dove’s autobiographical novel where she recalls her experiences in her home town. In an interview with Malin Pereira Dove puts autobiographical elements in the novel. She acknowledges that: “it was a moment in my life I had always felt ashamed of, that I had thrown the doll out the window. Why did I do it? It’s not a justification for why I threw the one doll out, but what does this show us about how society’s expectations and judgments impinge upon a small child? In a way it was, for me, a confession…it was more like an “Amen” (Pereira, *Rita* 161).

There is reference to rubber and oat meal factories in the novel. African American men came to Georgia to work in the factories. “And in the summer when the oats smell got headstrong and those rubber factories loudmouthed the heat, no one was nowhere but in the street” and grandma talks of the “traveling minstrel shows, come down from Cleveland with vaudeville for the grown-ups and puppet shows for the children” (*IG* 5-6). African American people give importance to their birthday ritual. During Virginia’s ninth birthday, she was allowed to drink coffee for breakfast, and she chose the dinner menu—chicken and apple sauce and pork ‘n’ beans” (*IG* 6-7).

Dove brings out the African American aesthetic tradition in the novel through the blues heroine Virginia with her different types of magical puppets. She is the classical musician concerned about high art. Puppets have been used since the earliest times to animate and
communicate the ideas and needs of human societies. Throughout rural Africa, puppetry still performs the function of transmitting cultural values and ideas. Puppets are an aspect of all history and everyday life. They attract the old and the young with their representation of different customs and traditions. They not only entertain the children but also captivate and influence them. Children explore the world of puppets with their creative genius to develop the necessary skills in life. Their imagination is stimulated and encouraged. Puppets help the children to develop their social skills. They mainly share our joys or sorrows; focus our deeds which are good or bad; disclose our characters, shy or cheerful, dull or bright along with their main purpose of teaching. Puppets can break down barriers and provide an effective means of communication not only to the children but also to the entire humanity.

Virginia’s answer to the question “how can a puppet, a lifeless object, show a human being how to portray emotion?” that “puppets didn’t imitate people but they were instruments for pointing out people’s odd characteristics” (IG 101). According to Virginia puppets are used to point out the human errors by acting as symbols. As Virginia teaches the children the art of puppetry, she makes them work with interest cutting the clothes for making a puppet; the art of stitching them without losing the originality of the face; and sewing with the needed stuff. It shows her commitment not only to the children, but also her commitment to society in building the real characters with their responsibility as devoted citizens of their country. Her invitation to the parents for the final puppet show is the crown of her actions.

The puppet can be in any shape or image, whatever the puppeteer or the child makes it. It can be the child’s friend without demanding something in return. When the students would not listen to Virginia, she talked to the students through Gina, who proudly declares, “I like myself” (IG 33). Children stopped talking and started listening to the puppet Gina. Any puppet has the
attraction to make the audience listen to it. It can be a clown. It can be naughty and get into trouble without hurting anyone. It can say what the child thinks, feel what the child feels and share a child's sadness. It can show a child who knows poverty, hunger, war and loss that there can also be joy and love and a happy ending. A puppet can show a child that her father or mother can also be sad, and it can demonstrate the value of love, the futility of quarrel and the benefit of cooperation and support.

For the blues heroine “art is a means of confrontation and immersion” (Jablonski 63). So Dove creates a permanent art form, the art of puppetry as Virginia’s career. In the second place music becomes the life energy of Virginia. She feels that her life as a musician surpasses as “all the joys and grief of private experience transplanted into wordless ecstasy” (IG 148). Virginia explains the First Bach Suite “that sounded like warm-up scales until the gradual modulations of the high notes in each phrase … a luminous melody unscrolling and floating away, high in the upper ether, where there was no memory or hurt” (IG 30). Virginia, a real musician, appreciates the music “that made you forget where you were, made you forget where your arms and legs ended and luscious sound began” (IG 22).

Being a black woman, she took interest to become a Cellist. Her first love is music. She learns to play the Cello even in her childhood. Her handling of tonette (a small, end-blown flute made of plastic, which was once popular in American elementary music education) reveals her craving for music. She always keeps a cello with her. She chooses the instrument cello, “the philosophers’ instrument …as the sound is one that invites meditation and contemplation” (IG 8). Virginia’s progress was given in the Six Suites for Unaccompanied Violoncello. Music assesses her growth in the first place. Dove’s novel Through the Ivory Gate “examines the interplay of classical European and African American vernacular musical traditions” (Jablonski 59).
Dove’s extensive travel in Germany gave her rich experiences as a jazz musician. Though she scored very low in the beginning, she tried again with Bach’s Suites to fulfill “the established rule that every union of parts must make a whole and exhaust all the notes necessary to the most complete expression of the contents, so that no deficiency should anywhere be sensible by which another part might be rendered possible” (*IG* 91). Clayton also encouraged her in the right way: “If a cellist were stranded on a desert island all he would need are his instrument and the Suites—no piano, no trio, no orchestra backup. The Suites are self-sufficient. They can sustain you for a lifetime” (*IG* 180).

Puppets are known for their creativity and movements. So Virginia wants the children to get transformation from their stagnant stage or from the dry world into the world of imagination, beyond their knowledge. She creates an apple tree with a hundred red eyes symbolizing strengthening attitude; a talking bush; a dragon with its blue-eye—the colour of soothing and healing; a ballerina (female professional ballet dancer) on the hippopotamus to highlight the art form of dance; and a peacock with its cross-eye—to show the blemish even in beauty.

In addition to the special relationship between puppets and the children, puppets also speak to adults. The earliest adventure stories were instructional, advising people on the right way to live. Traditional puppet stories from India, Indonesia, Japan and Eastern Europe have been devised and watched by adults. In Africa, masks and puppet figures have been used in initiation or funeral rites, and they play a complex role in community culture, ensuring good crops or a successful transition to adulthood. Dove has used puppets to teach values, and instruct the children mildly. Children love to watch a good puppet show, but they love manipulating puppets even more. A child can indulge in her love of puppets by creating her own puppet show.
Dove makes her heroine well versed in puppetry to bring some changes in the future generation. She attempts to give some kind of melioration through educating children.

For Dove “puppets don’t have the limitations of human beings, and anything they do becomes more forceful by virtue of the fact that they are free from any real feeling. They are indestructible even immortal” (*IG* 102) to give an indirect hint of the African American identity. Though African people are like puppets without being considered real human beings in the world of the white, Dove claimed her superiority of “indestructible” existence and “immortal” microcosm. Dove’s puppet Punch hits Judy several times over the head with his club but Judy never dies but has “her reemerge unscathed” (*IG* 102). These puppet shows are designed to bring the children’s private dreams true with their moving attitudes.

Dove’s search for her roots is apparent when she makes a reference to the Hopis Indian culture who believed in “Thunder Gods and pray to idols and stuff” because the Hopis “have an intimate relationship with the earth and the spirits that govern nature” and their belief is that “a man should never leave the land he was born on, lest his roots shrivel and die” (*IG* 137). Dove’s belief is also based on this supernatural virtue. She believed that her roots are in the United States of America and she is trying to prove it in all her works with the history of her family. Her use of the Kachina mask for the transgression of the user’s self to a “Thunder Maker” or “Yellow Corn Maiden” with the spirit of the God.

A kachina can represent anything in the natural world or cosmos, from a revered ancestor to an element, a location, a quality, a natural phenomenon, or a concept. Her desire to wear such a mask is to get rid of her African or American identity but to become a good spirit with universal appeal. The kachinas represent historical events and things in nature, and are used to educate children in the ways of life. Dove takes Kachina as a tool to teach humanity. Another
belief is that when a man puts on his mask all “his troubles disappear” (IG 137). Their excursion to the Niagara Falls revealed how the people had the feeling of living “on borrowed land” (IG 142). The birthday celebration was given importance. When Virginia was celebrating her ninth birthday, “she was allowed to drink coffee for breakfast, and she chose the dinner menu—chicken and applesauce and pork ‘n’ beans” to have their ritual.

Grandparents play a vital role in the maintenance of the African American families. It was Virginia’s grandma Evans who was willing to bury the incest relation of Aunt Carrie and grandma asked Virginia to forgive the sins of her Aunt because “old bones, dead and buried” (IG 248). In the opening of the novel, Virginia’s grandma was not willing to give her the doll which she wanted. Knowing the taste of Virginia, Evans advised her not to own that cheaply made doll. Later Virginia too rejected the doll and selected “Penelope with the long red hair and plump good looks of Brenda Starr … the creamy skin and dimpling cheeks” (IG 6).

The African novel also developed within the ambit of historical revaluation, cultural nationalism, political contestation, and anti-colonial protest. The novel is in first person narrative to impress upon the readers the fact that she narrates her own culture and her race. The third-person limited-omniscient narration provides a full portrait of the main character, Virginia King. Though the author is invisible at times, the central character speaks on behalf of Dove. Dove has adopted the speech form of oral style. The Prelude of the novel presents a conversation between Grandma Evans and Virginia to recall African American oral tradition.

“You don’t want that one.”

“Yes I do, please…”

“Look at it, Virginia!”

“Why can’t I –”
“Just look. What color is it?”
“Black.”
“And the mouth?”
“Red.”
“Big.”
“What else?’
“He’s smiling –”
“Grinning. What else?”
“Pretty eyes…”
“pop eyes, chile, those are pop eyes, Don’t you know who that is?”

There is a movement of the sea waves going forward and backward to make the novel alive with her narrative technique. The double movement of the river indicates that we can’t separate the past and the future because the past gets modified in the present and the present also gets modified in the past. The very common experiences of the everyday affairs are given much more importance as they are interconnected with the current of the story. As the novel is in the tradition of contemporary African American kunstlerroman, it clearly brings out the growth of the protagonist as an artist with her individual selfhood. As an artist, Virginia is self-conscious of representing the techniques indigenous to the black vernacular. The Kunstlerroman novel is a real meditation on art and culture.

Bildungsroman is a genre of the novel which focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood. Change is thus extremely important. The genre is further characterized by a number of formal, topical and thematic features. The term coming-of-age novel is sometimes used interchangeably with bildungsroman, but its use is
usually wider and less technical. A Künstlerroman is a specific sub-genre of Bildungsroman; it is a novel about an artist’s growth to maturity. Such novels often depict the struggles of a sensitive youth against the values of a middle class society. Dove’s mature thinking, mature thoughts about racism, violence, African Americanism, love, culture, and her handling of characters are a few characteristics of this Bildungsroman novel.

Dove wants to sustain her African American oral roots in her work. This oral tradition is reflected when there is a story within a story. The oral aspect “I” is an intrinsic part of Dove’s works. In the oral narration, there is a direct form of comments to the listener. At times Virginia gives her comments on the puppets and their talents. Virginia showed her determination “to study mime” when she had revealed it to Nigel.

“So what can you do?” he asked.

“I have a degree in drama, and I studied mime with Nathan Mannheim in Madison. I’ve played Adele in *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men* and Pandora in *Goin’ a Buffalo*, plus bit parts in nonblack drama…”

…“I don’t know. I mean, I never have, but I think I could. That is, I’m more than willing.”

“I am working as a secretary right now,” “well… I play the cello.” (*IG* 45).

Through her memory, Virginia easily navigates into the past events, and comes back to the present immediately. There is surely a kind of transition from the present to the historical past in each chapter. Chronology is not strictly observed. Music is a greater reflector of a cultural communication of a country to the rest of the world. Dove grew up with all kinds of music: blues and jazz. The novel grows along with the musical theme.
Blues heroine’s acceptance of misfortune is yet another traditional code of conduct. Virginia’s mastery over the Sixth Suite gave her enough strength to forget her pain of her rejection in love: “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). For the musicality in Through the Ivory Gate, Dove used J.S. Bach, the classical composer who combines “two or more independent melodies to make a harmonious melody in the novel. This technique, also known as polyphony, is present in much African American music … Virginia’s familiarity with jazz assists her in mastering the Suites… because jazz involves improvisation” (Jablon 68). Through music Virginia gives space for personal expression.

The transcendental self of Virginia is revealed as Dove narrates the incidents. Flashbacks of her childhood fascination with music illuminate the origins of her existential angst, her exaggerated sense of intellectual difference, and the subsequent emotional problems with Terry Murray. Jazz music gives way to improvisation. We see “the nine o’clock sun pressed flat into the pasty sky” (IG 14). A neighbor has upper arms “spongy as Wonder bread” (IG 73). We hear music like “a leaf shaken of the last rain” (IG 148). At moments her writing about music becomes music-like itself, “the true music that gripped and made pride bow down before the monumental sadness of being alive, music that required no explication, no translation” (IG 210). Dove used the incident from the story of Homer for the aptness of the title Through the Ivory Gate where Odysseus and Penelope meet each other after the war. In Homer’s story, Odysseus disguises himself as an old beggar to tell Penelope that her dream of her husband’s imminent return must be true:
Two gates for ghostly dreams there are: one gateway

of **honest horn**, and one 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. (Odyssey 19.560-69, qtd in

**AAWCT** 321). (emphasis mine).

A fellow puppeteer, a white man named Parker, in a drunken mood refers to the image from

Homer which gives the title: “Two gates for ghostly dreams there are: one gateway of honest

horn, and one 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” (*IG*

153). “Illusion, Virginia,” Parker continued “Glimmering illusion. That’s all we’re doing. 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. But do you know what? To the

others, the shadows are real. Only to us they’re not” (*IG* 153).

Virginia’s development is from an innocent girl to a new optimistic artist. In going back
to her hometown, she undertakes a journey of discovery. A family secret is revealed—the hidden

truth that had divided her parents, Ernest and Belle, and plunged them into isolating despair

which was narrated in the short story “Aunt Carrie” also. In the African American tradition short

stories were part of oral tradition. It got compiled as written form only in the eighteenth century

and the writers followed only the western norms with their themes until the Harlem Renaissance.

Later on, writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, and Claude McKay made deviations

from the western forms. Ellison made a tremendous change in the short story tradition. In the
1930s Langston Hughes came out with his short story collections which made the genre familiar in African American literature.

Dove’s short story collection *Fifth Sunday* briefly Dove’s extraordinary type of presenting the characters distinctly. The first story “Fifth Sunday” reflects the distressingly confined situation against which young people’s imagination compacts, but Dove is particular in exposing Valerie’s teenage passions which are suppressed in her. “Fifth Sunday” brings out the struggles of the African American girl Valerie. On the fifth Sunday in a month, the church youth are given a chance to preside over the main service. “They ushered, provided music, read text from the Scriptures, passed the collection plate—even led the congregation in prayer for the sick and shut-in. The only thing they did not do was the sermon” (*FS* 6). African American people have the belief that the church becomes both an ideological and an instrumental support in their life. It plays a vital part in their lives. The title “Fifth Sunday” is specifically found by Dove to throw light on the authority of the youth of the church on the particular Sunday. “The church stood on a hill all to itself, at the intersection of Prospect and Maple” (*FS* 3). The church is the fine viewpoint, “exclusivity, with nature and culture amicably combined and coded in the names of the streets” (*FS* 3).

The problems of the adolescent girls are very clearly given in the story. Coming to church is a consolation for Valerie and she daydreams about love and ends up in a shameful situation. There is a Catercorner park in the church. It is everything a park should be: green, shaded, and quiet. Stout black poles mark its perimeter at regular intervals, and strung between each pole are two chains, one at waist-level and another six inches from the ground. The park itself is segmented by two concrete paths that cut it on the diagonals, like a huge envelope (Righelato URL). Dove details the cultural crossroads in this story with her verbal imagery.
“Fifth Sunday” is a fine example of cultural variations, and their confined social set up. The word “intersection” allows cultural transactions of both the cultures. “Fifth Sunday” opens the door in the life of African-Americans dealing with life in varied settings. This is again a situation where Dove wants to show her cultural mulatto identity with Valerie’s lead in the white Lutheran Church. The final pronouncement makes her realize the damage which is attached to her name. But as an individual Valerie is ready to meet the lady later in the church to prove her innocence. The protagonist is willing to show her identity as a real heroine to the woman who victimizes her with her unreal words. At her moment of maximum confidence, Valerie stands at the top of Prospect looking down: “This was not the choked, winding alley where her father parked … here the road fell straight and sharply into the city below” (FS 6). The path is clear for her to challenge the world.

The church was the most glorious part of her existence. Her schoolmates she saw every day, in the halls or around the neighborhood—but when Sunday came; she would put on her best clothes and ride to the other side of the city. Deep familial traditions gave the church a varied congregation—people from all parts of the town and all social and economic levels filled the dark waxed pews, … looked forward to Sunday as if to a part” (FS 4).

In the church, hierarchy is maintained to show class distinctions. Valerie, the central character, is not given a chance to sing as the junior girls are supposed to be in the next rank as a junior usher. Though the minister’s son is so ugly and one eyed, she wants to fulfill her adolescent dreams with him. She is invited as one of the black youths of her church to the white Lutheran church to see a film about Martin Luther King. She is looked down upon by the other church goers. They have a belief that she is “pregnant” when she is fainting due to her physical sickness. The young girl is not allowed to grow independently with her fancies and dreams.
Valerie’s prime aim was to be in the vicinity of Andrew. She “felt the dampness under her arms… she itched all over” (FS 8) and fainted. The dreaming world of Valerie becomes a hell with a single word “pregnant.” This story tells the teenage problems of the African American girls, and their struggles during their adolescent period. Virginia’s aunt also crossed this kind of struggle during her teen age.

“Aunt Carrie” is written in the tradition of the dramatic monologue. This story gives space to visit the private life of Aunt Carrie with her brother Ernie, when she was a seventeen year old girl. The struggles of African American women are depicted in this story when Aunt Carrie says that “in those days men left their women for all sorts of reasons … and nobody blamed them much, because times were hard” (FS 62). Older or the eldest female child in the house plays a key role in African American households. These responsibilities are both a source of maturation and strain for these siblings. Now as an elder woman in the family, as others got married and got some work, Aunt Carrie must take care of her brother Ernie. Her brother was “the smart one in the family” and the whole family “loved him the best” since he was the “shining star” of the family. Though he was six feet, handsome, slim and tough with straight black eyebrows and broad shoulders, “he looked pale under his color” (FS 64). She feels that she “was the runt of the family and the homeliest” (FS 62) but “not smart enough for business, not pretty enough for marriage” (FS 63). Fate allowed her to get engaged to a widower, forty-two years old, in “the declining years of his life” when she was only seventeen. After the consolation from Carrie, Sam Rogers gave an excuse that he was not ready to forget his first wife and to remarry her. She was rejected even by a widower.

Father–daughter incestuous relationship is a common feature in black families. Pecola in Morrison’s The Bluest Eye and Celie in The Color Purple are victims of this incest relationship.
Dove is also aware of the incest motif. Walker’s Celie was seduced by her step-father, but her mother was not in a position to help her. Her father influenced Celie’s husband also to torture her with sexual abuses. By the end of the novel only she forgave everyone for their abuses, before that she couldn’t even discuss with anybody except God. Celie was shown as a subservient woman. Virginia’s father had incest with his own sister Aunt Carrie. The black girls are too weak and subservient to prevent the incest relationship because of their double-cross fire of colour discrimination and gender discrimination and lack of individuality. Aunt Carrie confessed her secret life to Virginia to get away from her past memories.

The central character of the story “Aunt Carrie” gives a real confession of her incestuous relation with her brother when she was an adolescent. Now Aunt Carrie, “the dark and wrinkled countenance” with “watery eyes, the smile with a missing tooth” confessed to her niece from her point of view. The daughter as a responsible person would like to know the reason for the rift between her mother and her aunt. She did not want any comment from Virginia but she wanted to have a person to listen to her woes of life or to share her repressed feelings. Most of the African American families have a weak family structure since many of them are headed by women. Dove very courageously places the incest motif in this story to tell the history of subjugation of the African American women. This shows the changing contours of the silences integral to this form of narrative by confessing the reason of the incest. “Aunt Carrie” informs the story of an ordinary black family bringing out “the constraints and elasticities of its transition from generation to generation” (Righelato URL).

The station becomes the symbolic travel place to expose the secrets of their family. She felt “Pittsburgh as something dark and roaring” (FS 69). The kerchief “with the pink rose in corner” is symbolically shown to refer to her “delicate blemish” (FS 61). The imagery of sheets
and hankies repeats the pattern in “Aunt Carrie”; in this case, the detail of the girl standing upon the “stitched rose” of one hanky evokes not only femininity and sexuality but also implies a loss of virginity and perhaps oppression and exploitation (it is not a bud, but an open rose; plus it is being stood upon) (AAR 201). She was the responsible person of the family to look after her younger brother, “the shining star” and the house when her mother went to work because her father had left them “holding the bills and the babies,” (FS 62). She was engaged to Sam Rogers, a widower of forty-two years “to clean and cook and to give him a little comfort in the declining years” (FS 63). After he got relieved from his grieving, he did not want to marry her.

The rejection would have created a deeper wound in her mind. This made her very close to her brother who was six feet and “handsome, slim, and tough with straight black eyebrows and broad shoulders” (FS 64). Her loneliness, rejection, dejection in life made her very close with her own blood, Ernie. As Bell was in her cleaning process, she found the note written by Aunt Carrie. The whole family cut their relationship with Carrie after that. After the death of Evans, Mrs. Evans invited Aunt Carrie for a visit to Saferstein Towers. Her statement “old bones, dead and buried” gave Aunt Carrie enough courage and strength to talk to Evans and they became friends again. The new outlook of women in analyzing the problems of women from their point of view is excellent in “Aunt Carrie.”

“Zulus” (the native name of the black South Africans who inhabit Zululand and Natal) is written with the view to tell of the gang of bikers, high school boys, including some dropouts, who “soared on the dark edges of adventure and superstition—young men on their heavy Japanese machines … a flaming sphere and a skull, stitched in silver and crimson” (FS 10). The Zulu Kingdom played a major role in South African history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Under apartheid, the Zulu people were classed as third-class citizens and suffered from
state-sanctioned discrimination. They remain today the most numerous ethnic group in South Africa, and now have equal rights with all other citizens. Dove attempts to highlight their experiences through this story.

These incidents from her play, short fiction, and fiction tell the African American peoples’ struggle in their lives from the plantation period to the modern period. By voicing those struggles, Dove recovered the African American ‘histories’ through their slavery, oppression, and predicaments. In the second place African American history insists on their freedom. Dove incorporates all the themes which are important to the consciousness and history of a people confronting a heritage of slavery. There is a balanced fusion of form and content and equilibrium between intellect and intuition. There is a unified structure with perfection. She has created black consciousness in the minds of the readers. There is social significance, relevance, and consequence. Dove presented a series of stories in her works through the richness of life, and her connection with the place where she lived, the culture with which she has her integration, and the region where she is connected.

Her play explores the meaning of freedom, its relative value, and its challenges. In her play, a newly freed slave searches for his roots by locating his displaced family members and finally attains his freedom by murdering white imperialism. Through this play Dove puts a greater emphasis on the need for freedom of the society which gives space to personal freedom and African Americans’ unique status on the forefront of the evolution of American society. This kind of freedom has to be radiated through individual freedom of mind and thought. Dove is willing to gain such freedom by accomplishing a new form of writing “the New Black Aesthetic” by combining the artistic nuances of African American forms with American themes.
Black Aesthetic is an umbrella term for a number of definitions of the movement’s position in relation to art in general and literature in particular: the motto “black is beautiful” is central, but art is expected to concentrate on the Black cultural experience, and moving beyond aesthetics and individuality, it is to inspire social change. Dove emerges as an advocate of this kind of new canon formation. Dove’s New Black Aesthetic analyses the self-reliant independence which refers to man being independent. Freedom does not come from outside, but from the inner self, because man upholds his freedom by being true to himself. The individual with such powerful perseverance is the winner over any perplexity. Man should fight to get freedom from his victimization, discrimination, and exploitation. Dove is not to gain spiritual riches but to gain identity recognition and freedom which are the bases of human life. This is the vision Dove carries into the very heart of existence. The next chapter highlights Dove’s “New Black Aesthetic” and how she moves ahead of racism and black consciousness.