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REIMAGINING SELFHOOD: ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVELS

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Annotation

This thesis explores the artistic representation of African-American identity in the novels of Toni Morrison, focusing on how notions of selfhood, memory, and cultural trauma are reimagined through narrative style, symbolism, and characterization. The study examines Morrison's aesthetic strategies for depicting Black selfhood as a dynamic process shaped by history, collective memory, gender experience and intergenerational trauma. The findings demonstrate that Morrison's artistic interpretation of African-American identity contributes to a deeper understanding of Black subjectivity, moral resilience, and the transformative power of storytelling.

Keywords

Toni Morrison; African American identity; selfhood; trauma; memory; symbolism; cultural narrative

INTRODUCTION

The question of African American identity occupies a central place in modern American literature, reflecting historical oppression, cultural displacement, and the search for self-definition. Toni Morrison presents identity not as a fixed category, but as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by memory, history, and collective experience. Her novels reveal both the psychological consequences of racial trauma and the spiritual strength of cultural belonging.

The purpose of this research is analyzed the artistic representation of African American identity in Morrison's novels and to examine how selfhood is reconstructed through symbolism, memory and narrative form.

AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY AND SELFHOOD

From a literary and cultural perspective, African American identity is often marked by fragmentation and loss of historical continuity. Morrison interprets identity as:

remembering and reclaiming the past;

restoring historical and cultural memory;

negotiating between individual and collective selfhood.

Thus, identity becomes an act of resistance against social erasure and a means of psychological renewal.

ARTISTIC STRATEGIES IN THE REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITY

Morrison employs rich aesthetic techniques, including:

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symbolism and mythic imagery;

polyphonic narration and multiple voices;

non-linear time and memory-based structure;

intergenerational storytelling.

Symbolic elements such as names, ancestral voices, songs and cultural memory function as bridges between the past and present, illustrating the reconstruction of selfhood.

MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND CULTURAL RE-IMAGINATION

A key aspect of Morrison's novels is the legacy of historical trauma transmitted across generations. Her characters confront:

emotional silence,

internalized oppression,

fractured family relations.

Yet Morrison's narrative space also allows for:

healing through memory,

cultural reconnection,

restoration of moral identity.

Selfhood is therefore presented not merely as recovery of the past, but as **creative re-imagining of life beyond trauma**.

CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison's novels depict African American identity as a dynamic and transformative process shaped by memory, trauma, and cultural belonging. Through symbolic imagery and multilayered narration, she reimagines selfhood as an act of resistance, recovery, and spiritual renewal, demonstrating the power of literature in restoring silenced histories and cultural self-awareness.

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