

## **Justification of the Title in Morrison's Jazz**

### **Introduction**

Jazz is a Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning novel by Toni Morrison which hit the shelves in 1992. Jazz is a musical manifestation of the suffering and temptation of African-Americans. The musical Jazz is played structurally throughout the novel. There are solos in the form of alternating character voices and the feeling of dissonance and harmony at the same time. Jazz is the vibe of the City and Jazz is a tonic to stir up the vengeance. The musical Jazz was a thriving genre during the Harlem Renaissance.

### **Jazz and Characters**

The musical dissonance is actioned and dialogue by individual characters as well. We have characters like Alice Manfred and the Miller sisters who deem Jazz music as an anthem of hell to highlight its sinful power. Jazz makes Joe fall in love with the young Dorcas and it is the loud performance of Jazz which enrages Joe to kill the same Dorcas with whom he tried to form a new identity. But the melodious harmony in Jazz is represented as healing between Joe and Violet through Felice as she brings her records and watches them dance.

### **The Power of Jazz**

Jazz is played as quite powerful in the novel. Jazz in the City has an intoxicating effect, inviting its citizens to enjoy its wine made of solos and other musical notes. Jazz is a dominant ruler of the City which can determine the seasons. In every season, the clarinet players determine its warmth or cold. The musical shift highlights Wild's disappearance which chases Joe for a long-lasting period. Jazz gives characters a musical flash-back.

### **Jazz and Racial Prejudices**

Jazz gives a historical insight of the miseries of African-Americans. Their life in the South was marked with prejudice and then destruction. Many people lost their lives and the ones who were spared, lived their life from hand to mouth. Thus the journey from **"black and blues man"** to **"black therefore - I'm-blues man"** began. Jazz music had itself a prejudiced behaviour against its listeners which made them commit gross crimes. In short, Jazz made the black people realize how they were treated before and how they can lead a peaceful life in the city.

### **Jazzy Melody in Phrases**

Jazz as a novel is marked with the words which create musical effects. For instance, see the ending lines of the novel,

**"Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are now."**

The unconventional ending of the novel is renowned for its repeated three words or phrases, indicating a sense of urgency through musical use of words.

### **Conclusion**

Jazz is Morrison's musical experiment with its own set of risks, difficulty and melody. Morrison, an African-American writer, worked hard to reinforce the melodious echo of a sad history to her readers.

## **Themes In Jazz - Toni Morrison**

### **Introduction**

Jazz is a Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning novel by Toni Morrison which hit the shelves in 1992. Jazz is a musical manifestation of the suffering and temptation of African-Americans. Jazz emerged as the second part of a trilogy which began with *Beloved* and ended in *Paradise*, featuring the plight of African Americans.

### **Youth vs. Age**

One of the novel's central relationships is the sustained romantic affair between Joe Trace, a fifty year old man, and Dorcas, who is in her late teens. Throughout the novel, the murdered girl becomes a symbol of youth. Her aunt, Alice Manfred, identifies Dorcas' youth with a budding sexuality that has brought calamity. The motif of the garden of Eden presents the image of Dorcas as a young Eve who

is enticed and enticing. Violet Trace's reaction to Dorcas is similar. Her jealousy stems from her husband's affair and she can't help but notice the contrast between her aging, sagging body and Dorcas' youthful, fuller figure. Violet tries to drink malts and eat multiple meals to regain the pounds of her youth and her **"competition"** with the dead girl is ironic because Violet does not want to compete with the young, dead child; rather, she wishes that Dorcas could be the young daughter that she never had. Dorcas' friend Felice comes to serve this role for Violet and she also provides consolation for Joe, demonstrating a healthier way in which **"youth"** can sustain **"age"** without bloodshed.

### **The Music**

The novel borrows its title from Jazz music and the idea of music is discussed throughout the novel. Alice Manfred and the Miller sisters interpret jazz music as the anthem of hell. The passion and pleasure that Dorcas and Violet find in the music is contrasted with the musical treatment of Joe's crime. When he stalks and shoots Dorcas, it is at a party where loud music is being played to incite passion, **"boil"** the blood and **"encourage"** misbehavior. For the entire novel, music is the weapon that the City wields to control its citizens. The seasons and weather are determined by the presence of clarinet players in the street. Music also bears a sadness that can be juxtaposed to Violet's ribaldry and Joe's flared passion. Wild's disappearance takes place as her body is replaced with a trace of music and this sound haunts Joe's memory for the rest of his life. Similarly, the **"blues man"** who walks the streets becomes the **"black-and-blues man"** and finally, the **"black-therefore-I'm-blues man,"** providing a critique of racism. The **"blues"** songs that the characters evoke are largely the consequence of suffering brought about by America's racist traditions.

### **Racism**

Racism is one the best themes of the novel Jazz. Jazz is a musical juxtaposition of the misery of African-Americans. They were treated beyond slaves in the South but the black colour made them an object of racism. They migrated to the North but they were subjected to its Geography. Out of the identity crisis, it made them commit gross crimes like adultery and murder in the intoxicating atmosphere of Jazz music. In this novel, the race is presented as a cause of division and destruction with Jazzy wine.

We found another theme in the novel Jazz. The people were discriminated on the basis of their race and color. White people were considered superior and the black were treated as inferiors. Alice Manfred suffers from the discrimination of that society. She is always in a state of fear. She did not attend the outdoor meetings. She remained confined within the four walls of home. She used to assume things under the fear of the society. She used to talk about **"the judgment day"** and the **"deadly bear"**.

### **Memory**

Memory is mostly developed through the presence of several orphans in the novel and while Dorcas is the only young orphan in the story, most of the development of this theme actually comes through Joe Trace. Golden Gray and Violet have each lost a parent, while Joe and Dorcas have lost both parents in fires and riots. In Joe's case, he never knew his parents and his "orphanhood" is defined by his "trace" of a memory. Joe is an orphan who never knew his true parents and continues to struggle with his memory after he leaves Virginia and comes to Harlem; similarly, Dorcas' memory as a child in East St. Louis IL, is built around a solitary photograph and is fading fast in Harlem.. In the same way that Joe and Golden Gray and Dorcas have lost their parents, Morrison makes the argument that the African-American community as a whole experienced a sort of "orphanhood" during this turbulent period. After slavery separated families, the "Great Migration" displaced millions of bodies further separating them from their collective and cultural memories. Memory is definitely the most important theme in the novel. All of the major characters, Violet, Joe, Dorcas -- even Alice

Manfred, all of them suffer the consequences of living a life that is dissociated from the memories of the past.

### **Motherhood**

Mothers are almost always absent from the lives of Morrison's characters, having abandoned their children, died, or simply disappeared. The absence of mothers also reflects the absence of a "motherland," as the African-American community searches for a way to make America its home, despite the horrors of dislocation and slavery. The mother also signifies a common cultural and racial heritage that eludes the characters as they struggle to define themselves. The word "mama" rests on the tip of the characters' tongue and is an unconscious lament for a lost home or feeling of security. During one of Violet's visits, Alice Manfred blurts out "Oh, Mama," and then covers her mouth, shocked at her own vulnerability. Dorcas also refers to her mother out of nowhere as she lies on her deathbed, thinking, "I know his name but Mama won't tell." Morrison's narrator, ever-present in the lives and histories of her characters, doubles as a kind of mother for the text, tending to the community of black Harlem.

### **Violence**

Violence is one of the major themes of the novel. Many violent incidents take place in the novel. It was the effect of the violent behavior of the characters that brought the death of the many characters in the novel. It was violence that forced Joe to kill Dorcas. He used to kill her violently. He does not feel pity for her. He does not care about his relationship with her. He became full of anger and rage.

Violet takes the role of an attacker when she used to injure the face of the murdered Dorcas. She feels no pity for her. She wants to take revenge from her. Alice also showed violent behavior at her dejection. She was full of anger because of her disloyal lover.

### **Search for identity**

Search for identity also serves as a major theme in the novel. Joe, Golden and Violet are some characters, who remain busy in finding out who they are and creating and maintaining their identities. Joe Trace, at first, is identified as a hunter during his childhood. But this identity is merely known as a skill and a bargain with a businessman. He marries Violet Trace to form an identity of a husband but he still remains anxious about one thing. Who is he? Who are his parents? He tries to find his trace of motherhood in Wild but she is unable to recognize him as a son. He starts his love affair with Dorcas not because he wants to enjoy her physical beauty but for the establishment of his new identity.

Violet is also leading a traceless life just like her husband does but she develops her identity as a wife which is somewhat stained by her want of being a mother. She is unable to beget a child. When she hears about her husband's love affair with Dorcas, she grows furious because she might accept her as her daughter, not as her sister-wife. Manifestly, the identity crisis of Joe and Violet make them commit many good and bad deeds.

### **Memory**

Memory is also an important theme of the novel. We find all characters in the novel feeling regretful of their past. They wanted to get rid of their painful past. Memories of the past are after them like a ghost. Joe, Violet and Dorcas have painful memories of their past. They did not enjoy a luxurious life at a younger age. The relationship between Violet and Joe also has painful memories. She remained lonely in her younger age. Now she wants to have a baby.

### **Character Sketch of Violet**

The wife of Joe Trace, Violet is an unlicensed hairdresser, who is nicknamed "Violent" after she invades Dorcas' funeral to dishonor the girl's face with a knife. Violet married Joe Trace in Virginia. Violet is a dark-skinned, skinny woman of about 50 at the time of the novel's main events. She seems worn down by life's difficulties as the novel opens. Nearly silent in her marriage, Violet is apparently depressed. She and Joe didn't have children, and now she longs for a child to love, but it is too late. Joe's affair with Dorcas provides a target for her anger, sadness, and sense of incompleteness and forces her to address her need to take responsibility for how she will live her

later years. Violet is capable of love. Her affection for her pet birds, her early adoration of Joe, and her later compassion for Felice demonstrate this. It is as if love has somehow frozen within her. Her fears reach back to her father's abandonment of the family, which resulted in her mother's suicide. The conclusion of the novel indicates that even if Violet is unable to fully restore the physical body of her youth, she is able to resuscitate her marriage.

### **Character Sketch of Joe Trace**

Joe Trace grew up in Vesper County, Virginia in the Williams' household. Joe marries Violet and later moves to New York and makes a decent living as a salesman for Cleopatra cosmetics. He is a hardworking, pleasant man whom people like, especially the women to whom he sells cosmetics. But he suffers from what he calls an "inside nothing." He lacks an understanding of who he is, an orphan who can't even guess his father's identity and is unsure if Wild is his mother. Joe has two different-colored eyes that suggest his uncertain identity. His last name, Trace, also suggests this. He has given himself the name because his parents disappeared "without a trace." When Violet withdraws into depression, Joe is left alone in his own house, a second abandonment, and pours his affection into Dorcas. He views Dorcas as a final opportunity to regain his youth and excitement, but the relationship ends in rejection and helpless violence. After Joe Trace shoots and kills Dorcas, he is not prosecuted because as she was dying, Dorcas refused to reveal his name to the authorities. With Felice's indirect assistance, Joe is able to come to terms with his past and renew his relationship with his wife.

