

Jazz by Toni Morrison

Q 1: Discuss the character and role of Violet in *Jazz*. By what particular devices and effects is she conveyed? How much sympathy do you have for her? Areeba

Toni Morrison is the best known for bringing the 1920's Black Harlem Renaissance back to life. She uses the dissonant and sensual music of jazz which brilliantly structures the plot of her novel *Jazz*. Morrison revisits the African-American past and creates the characters who tell "**history as life lived**". She demystifies the narrative of the dominant culture about the Afro-American past and raises the real history in its place. The novel is set in the time of the African American Great Migration when millions of southern black migrants moved to northern industrial centers of Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and New York City in order to escape the growing violence and racism in the south and to find better paying jobs. This influx of black people created a racial upheavals in the cities. The characters of *Jazz* are products of racial and personal trauma resulting from these upheavals. And this trauma gives them their depth, complexity, grace and violence. Violet Trace is the quasi tragic heroine of the novel. She stumbles through the novel to reconnect with the part of herself that have been shattered, hidden, or forgotten amidst the jagged-edged cacophony of her times. Violet is the postmodern trauma figure trying to find her mythic Modern Self.

In *Jazz* Violet Trace is the central character through which Morrison describes the woes of the black women. The narrator herself seems to sympathize with Violet at times. Violet is a fifty six year old woman living in Harlem with her husband Joe. Hopelessly scrawny with very dark skin, Violet is beautiful if one looks at her long enough. The novel begins with a traumatic event, a crime of passion which leads to a trauma for Violet. Her husband, Joe Trace kills his teenage mistress, Dorcas. Violet finds out at the funeral. She becomes sullen with her husband and explodes into violence at his lover's funeral, earning herself the nickname "***Violent***". She has a reputation in Harlem for being odd and she does not quite fit with the other ladies. She exhibits odd behavior such as sitting in the street for hours and trying to steal someone's baby. Rodrigues sees Violet as "***the one whose psyche has been deformed by twenty years in the City, so that people call her 'Violent.'***"

Violet has a "***malleable, permeable and confused Self***" and she goes through many moments of psychological fragmentation, restlessness, doubt, and disorientation throughout the novel. She tries to understand her fragmented self in relation to her traumatic past and confused present. The narrator calls Violet's encounter with her fractured selves her "***private cracks***". The writer has used a lot of symbols as well as the rendition of jazz music in order to convey the character of Violet. According to Barbara William Lewis, "***Jazz is a music with a vocabulary of its own***". The story of Violet plays as backup to the dazzling rendition and improvisation of the music itself in *Jazz*. The writer has used jazz music as a tool of self-expression for Violet. Violet and Joe move to the City as a couple in 1906 and experience a sense of freedom greatly even before reaching their destination. They spend half of their journey on train dancing to the music only they can hear,

"Joe stood up, his fingers clutching the baggage rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way, and told Violet to do the same. They were hanging there, a young country couple, laughing and tapping back at the track".

The music becomes a symbol of Violet's quest for subjectivity. She, like the music of jazz, desires to be "***someone not molded by the world as she is***" but as someone who uses both creative and violent force to find her solo voice in the noise of the world.

Violet owns a lot of birds. The birds serve as a symbolic connection between her rural past and urban present. Violet talks to her birds more than to anyone else. She has even taught her parrot to



say *I love you* to her. This serves as a symbol for the lack of affection in her life. This makes the reader sympathize with her desperation for love and her longing for someone ***"whose touch is a reassurance, not an affront or a nuisance"***. Violet lacks in communication with Joe. Her silence annoys the later. Violet throws the birds out after her violent action at Dorcas' funeral. This action may be symbolic of throwing love out of the window, letting go of and not appreciating the love she has. By releasing her birds Violet solidifies the emergence of that Violet, whom the whole City calls *Violent*. According to Cannon,

"It is as if she has let herself instead of the birds out of her cage, out of the position the community expects her to fulfill".

Violet finds Alice's company as a way of healing for herself. Both of them are at two opposite ends of a tragedy and still find solace in each other's company. Just like her profession of mending and sewing clothes, Alice mends the shattered soul of Violet. Another conflict in Violet's self is her mother-hunger which makes her obsessed with Dorcas. This gap in her personality is filled by Dorcas's friend, Felice. Eventually, both Joe and Violet find resolution of their marital discord through their shared grief and through their interactions with Dorcas's friend Felice. They begin to listen to music again which bring back spirit into their lives.

In a nutshell, Morrison dramatizes Violet's desire to remove herself from poverty, from loneliness, and from her mother's death. Violet escapes stagnation in order to survive. According to Pattison:

Morrison's novel suggests that, bearing these traumas [from her past], Violet should be read not as exceptional but as representative of the African American experience of migration and cultural dislocation at the turn of the century. Entering the mechanized, disciplined world of the northern city, Violet must refashion her private self as a means of entering the public domain of urban life.

In order to heal and reform her wounded identity, Violet needs Alice's physical presence and emotional support. She thus succeeds in transforming her identity by adapting to her circumstances and embracing female community. She expels her old self to make room for a new one - a Self she birthed and healed on her own, not one handed to her by the ghosts of her past traumas.

Q 2: Write a comprehensive note on the art of characterization in Jazz. What kind of relationship is there between Joe and Violet? Hafsa

Jazz (1992) is **the second novel in** a trilogy of Morrison's novels reflecting on the idea of love and its manifestations. The novel deliberately **mirrors** the music of its title, with various characters **"improvising"** solo compositions that fit together to create a whole work. The tone of the novel also shifts with these compositions, from bluesy laments to upbeat, sensual ragtime. The novel also utilizes the **call-and-response** style of jazz music, allowing the characters to explore the same events from different perspectives.

Morrison's art of **characterization in Jazz is less extreme than that** in *Beloved* or *Song of Solomon*, she quite possibly surpasses these other novels in giving us a group of characters from **ordinary life** about whom we come to care, whose angst and frustration demand our **empathy**. The two principal characters, **Joe and Violet**, are **complex, dynamic creations**. They progress from youthful enthusiasm and hopes through adulthood and disappointed expectations, but an act of uncharacteristic violence prepares each for a process of grieving and suffering by which both learn to love and care for one another. Yet each takes a different course toward his or her liberation.



Violet is a **fifty-six-year-old** woman living in Harlem with her husband Joe. Hopelessly scrawny with very **dark skin**, **"She is awfully skinny, Violet; fifty, but still good looking when she broke up the funeral"**. She has a reputation in Harlem for being **odd** and she does not quite fit in with the other ladies. **"She had been a snappy, determined girl and a hardworking young woman, with the snatch gossip tongue of a beautician. She liked, and had, to get her way"**. She is an unlicensed **hairstylist**, who is nicknamed **"Violent"** after she invades Dorcas' funeral to dishonour the girl's face with a knife. Violet married Joe Trace in Virginia, and she was similarly eager to disavow her memories of an itinerant father and a mother who killed herself by jumping into a well. She was an **orphan** raised by her grandmother in rural Virginia. In Harlem, Violet struggles to preserve her sanity, amidst the tumult of three miscarriages, her husband's affair, and her ebbing youth. Her relationship with Joe becomes strained when she falls into depression. **"Over time her silences annoy her husband, then puzzle him and finally depress him"**. Neither she nor Joe had wanted children, but as Violet grows older, she begins to feel a deep longing for something to love. After Dorcas' funeral, Violet relies upon Alice Manfred's advice to stay with her husband. 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.

Joe Trace grew up in Vesper County, Virginia in the Williams' household. After Hunter's Hunter intimates that his mother is Wild, a "wild-woman" who roams the margins of society, Joe makes three failing attempts to track her down. A feeling of **abandonment** and an **uncertainty** about his **identity** plagues Joe from that moment on. Joe therefore does not know where he comes from and thinks, mistakenly, that he cannot be complete without this information, thereby deferring his happiness and looking to others to make him whole. Joe is a **kind-hearted** and **fundamentally good** man who is driven by sadness and fear to shoot and kill his young lover, Dorcas. **"He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deep-down, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going"**. Like his wife, Violet, Joe also suffers from unstable and painful childhood. In an effort to sever his memories of an incomplete, "trace" of a mother, Joe marries Violet and later moves to New York and makes a decent living as a **salesman** for **Cleopatra cosmetics**. He is highly regarded in the Harlem community for being a decent man and something in his face reminds recent migrants to the City of their rural roots. After living in "the City" for two decades, his idealism is tempered by the emerging silence that he shares with his wife. **"Violet takes better care of her parrot than she does me. — Maybe that's the way it goes with people been married long as we have. But the quiet. I can't take the quiet. She don't hardly talk anymore"**. He views Dorcas, a teenager, as a final opportunity to regain his youth and excitement. He tries to secure Dorcas's affection by adoring her but the relationship ends in rejection and helpless violence. After Joe Trace shoots and kills Dorcas, **"he thinks about her all the time. Nothing on his mind but her. Won't work. Can't sleep. Grieves all day, all night..."** He is not prosecuted because as she was dying, Dorcas refused to reveal his name. With Felice's indirect assistance, Joe is able to come to terms with his past and renew his relationship with his wife.

As with Joe and Violet, Morrison recounts the pivotal events in Dorcas's life that shaped her personality, making her more sympathetic than she would at first appear. As a young girl, **Dorcas** lost both of her parents in the same day when her father was killed on a streetcar and her mother died during the East St. Louis riots, which left her **orphaned** and **homeless**. Felice describes her as, **"long hair, wavy, half good, half bad. Light skinned. Nice shape. If you looked at each thing, you would admire that thing— All together it didn't fit"**. Like other characters, Dorcas also migrated to the City where her life was to be rebuilt by the obsessive care of her aunt, Alice Manfred. However, as a teenager, Dorcas begins to rebel against her aunt's old-fashioned tastes, and refashions herself as a **sexually-desirable woman**. **"High-heeled shoes, the vampy hats, makeup of any kind—all of that was**



outlawed in Alice Manfred's house".

Dorcas wants to be **looked at and admired**. **"Guys looked at her, whistled and called out. In school all sorts of boys wanted to talk to her"**. When Joe visits her aunt's house, she successfully captures the older man's gaze. **"He's old. Really old. Fifty. But he met her standards of good looking"**. Like a little girl, she is eager for the gifts that he brings her and she becomes **petulant and moody** when she does not get her way. She likes to keep secrets from others. **"But she liked secret stuff. — Planning and plotting how to deceive Mrs. Manfred. Hiding things. She always did like secrets. She wasn't ashamed of him either"**.

Throughout the novel, Dorcas' interests in jazz music, the **"fast life,"** and **"vampy clothing"** bring about her eventual independence from her aunt's puritanical ideas. Dorcas' independence is marked by her relationship with Joe Trace, whose age and casual demeanour bear a marked contrast to Dorcas' speed and excitement. After Dorcas grows tired of Joe and of his unfailing adulation, she chooses a second lover who is closer to her age named Acton. **"I wanted girlfriends to talk to about it. About where we went and what he did. I wanted to have a personality and with Acton I'm getting one. I have a look now"**. Frequently, she gives Acton presents and acts toward him with the deference and care she learned from Joe's treatment. **"She was doing for Acton what the old man did for her—giving him little presents she bought from the money she wheedled out of the old man"**. Dorcas chooses to die in order to be watched, making herself a martyr by bleeding to death rather than going to the hospital. **"I know his name but Mama won't tell"**.

Felice is Dorcas' best friend and **co-conspirator**, sharing in her efforts to evade Alice Manfred's rules. Felice lives with her grandmother, although her parents come home when they can from their employment in a town called Tuxedo Junction. She goes with Dorcas to the party where Joe kills her. Before the party, Felice loans Dorcas a ring Felice's mother stole for her daughter from Tiffany's as the result of a racial slur that she experiences while in the store. Much to Felice's distress, Dorcas wears the ring to her grave. Felice visits Violet and Joe to inquire about the ring. Felice and the couple become friends and eventually helps to free Joe and Violet from the spell of Dorcas when she gives them more information about what the girl was really like in life. In her exploits with Dorcas, as well as her conversations with the Traces, Felice (a name that means **"happy"**) serves the role of a **comforter**.

Alice Manfred a **widow** in her late fifties, is Dorcas's aunt and legal guardian. She lives alone in Harlem, works as a seamstress. **"A dignified lady who did fine work off and on in the garment district"**. She is deeply mistrustful of young people and the sinful lives they seem to be leading. Alice is overly protective and concerned for Dorcas, and hopes to shelter her from what she sees as a threatening world. Her own husband had an affair with another woman and died soon after.

The interracial son of Vera Louise Gray and Henry LesTroy, **Golden Gray** is the result of a forbidden love between a white woman and black man. With his **golden curls** and **light skin**, Golden looks completely white and he is raised to believe that he is so. His mother does not claim him as her own but says that he was **adopted**. When True Belle tells him the truth of his parentage, Golden's sense of his own identity is destroyed. He sets out to hunt down and kill his father, because he assumes that the black man violated his mother. He holds a **racial stereotype** of black deviance that is deeply set-in white male consciousness. But his plans change when he meets his father for the first time. Rather than strike out the part of his identity that does not correspond with his own sense of self, Golden **seeks refuge in Wild's blackness** and escapes from society with her, roaming free in the woods. Golden abandons the white upbringing that his mother offered him and also knows that the black community will never fully accept him. He straddles the two worlds but belongs to neither so he



reverts to a natural existence that lies beyond the community.

Henry LesTroy or Hunter's Hunter serves several roles in the novel. As "Henry," he is the slave who has a romantic involvement with Vera Louise Gray, though he is unaware that she later becomes pregnant. As Henry LesTroy, he takes care of the pregnant and deranged woman, named Wild, and as Hunter's Hunter, he offers valuable lessons in life to her son, Joe Trace. A convoluted character, he serves as a **connection between the folklore of Violet Trace's grandmother and the disappearance of Joe Trace's mother.**

True Belle, a slave in Baltimore, cared for Vera Louise Gray and her son, Golden Gray. The mother of Rose Dear (and grandmother of Violet Trace), True Belle shares the stories of Golden Gray as she puts her daughter's life back together. As she survives slavery, the initial separation of her family and the suicide of her daughter, True Belle functions as a **symbol of strength and fortitude.**

Wild, a semi-conscious and pregnant black woman, whom Golden Gray discovers on his trip to his father's cabin. She eventually gives birth to Joe Trace but as a **"wild-woman,"** she is unable to function as a mother or in any other social capacity. As she lives in the forest at the community's edge, Wild's phantom-like presence tortures her son Joe Trace, as he makes repeated and unsuccessful attempts to communicate with her.

Role of the City in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

All cities are mad: but the madness is gallant. All cities are beautiful, but the beauty is grim.

— Christopher Morley

Jazz is a spellbinding masterpiece by Toni Morrison, due to the haunting passion of its profound love story, the bittersweet lyricism and refined sensuality of its powerful and elegant style. The scintillating City around the Lenox Avenue drives the narrative in a mysterious way that encompasses a tragedy among the people who had train-danced into the City, from points south and west, in search of a promise. The novel sets in a black Manhattan neighborhood of Harlem in the year 1926, where amidst the chaos of individual relationships, the city emerges as omnipotent and glamorous, a force that inspires and controls the courses of human characters. Below the gaze of the city's skyscrapers, the ghost of Dorcas is haunting the Traces.

Morrison intentionally selected distract of Harlem as the setting of her novel to capture and assess the transformative energies of Harlem in the 1920s, that at time was "the capital" of the Black world. Under social as well as economic pressure, many African Americans decided to move north hoping to find better jobs, more opportunities for education and, most importantly, a better climate of interracial relationship. Harlem then developed as the center of this new political and cultural awareness, which was partly due to its diverse but mainly black population, but above all because of the great number of educated and socially conscious African Americans who chose to settle down in the district brought about new ways to respond to the continuing discrimination. For the people who had lived in the country all their lives, ***Living in the City was the best thing in the world.***

Those African Americans who had left the South in order to escape racial violence, were largely disappointed, as only a few decades later, lynching and race riots also began to disrupt the peace in the cities. So after World War I, many African Americans were left disillusioned, as they had been hoping for more racial solidarity in the aftermath of the war. ***Everything you want is right where you are: the church, the store, the party, the women, the men, the postbox (but no high schools), the furniture store, street newspaper vendors, the bootleg houses (but no banks).***



The Harlem Renaissance was as diverse in its cultural expression as the people that created it. The topics that prevailed during the Harlem Renaissance reflected that feeling of marginality and alienation that African Americans were facing; these themes occurred in literature of that period as well as in arts and music. Jazz starts to delineate both the dangers and the opportunities that city life provides for the African American inhabitants of postwar Harlem. As a result, a much more ambiguous assessment of the city experience is presented that is concerned with both, the quality of human life and human relationships in the postwar metropolis.

One of the factors that made Harlem so attractive for black migrants from the rural South: economic opportunity. Employment and educational opportunities offered the chance for a better life. *Part of why they loved [the city] was the specter they left behind;* the specter of racism. James de Jongh, for instance, has pointed out: *"Life in New York may have been harsh, but the migrants themselves often came from backgrounds of such extreme poverty and oppression that Harlem, in contrast, seemed to be the Promised Land."*

After living in Vesper County and Baltimore, the main characters: Joe and Violet decide to take the train to New York in 1906, joining the steady migration of black Southerners. *They were dancing...the city that danced with them proving how much it loved them.* Excited though challenged by the rigors of the "city life" the couple decide that they did not want children and Violet's three miscarriages "were ore inconvenience than loss". However, by the time she was forty her "mother hunger" had become a "panting, unmanageable craving" and her "city life" began to unravel in chaos as a picture of anonymity, estrangement, and silent suffering.

Despite the fact that racist discrimination continues in the North, life in the city is to a large extent experienced as exhilarating and empowering. Moreover, it has a **liberating quality** because moving in such large 'crowds' also means unprecedented safety. The migrants had been "running from want and violence" and despite the fact that racism does not end in the urban north, Harlem nevertheless offers a much higher degree of security.

The **narrator seeks to be the voice of the city** and follows the characters of Toni Morrison's Jazz, to document their lives. The narrator wishes to be the voice of the city by speaking and listening on behalf of it. As the city, the narrator is to address the city's culture and roots. It would be **the ideal narrator** as an unbiased and all-knowing character. One who could speak on behalf of every character and provide an accurate background of each character or location. The narrator as the voice of the city creates depth within the novel. The illusion of the city's free spirit is created through the flow caused by the lack of punctuation and describes each street as composed of a symphony of sounds. However, Narrator's emphatic statement; *I'm, crazy about this city* also emphasizes the fact that the city cannot be described by a single narrator, whose identity is the matter of each reader's imagination, as **the city is experienced differently by each individual**.

At times, the city does become a character of a metaphysical nature that has power to control and manipulate the lives of the characters. *That's the way the City spins you. Makes you do what it wants, go where the laid-out roads say to...You can't get off the track a City lays for you..* The image that the City can bring no harm to any of the characters, is preserved till the end of the narrative. When Joe is "hunting for her" with a gun, it is stated that the City has nothing to do with the murder and demise of Dorcas, as *He stalks through the City and it does not object or interfere*, gives a very fatalistic undertone.

"She (Toni Morison) captures that almost indistinguishable mixture of the anxiety and rapture of expectation—that state of desire where sin is just another word for appetite."



The role of memory in “Jazz” by Toni Morrison

In a novel that focuses on the migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North, **Toni Morrison** attempts to retrace the mechanism of cultural authority through the representation of repressed speech. In Toni Morrison's fiction, the questions of **who is enabled to speak, of what may be spoken, and of how the language of the past may be “rewritten”** are nowhere more crucial than in “Jazz”.

Memory is a faculty that plays an important role in the lives of human beings and it seems to become **obtrusive** in certain acute hours of personal history. In the present world, memory attends as a code to one's multiple modes of being and shapes who a person is as part of a historic sense of belonging. A collection of memory and its accumulation gives rise to what is known as **nostalgia**. So, memory is the most important theme in “Jazz”. All of the major characters, **Violet, Joe, Dorcas**, and even **Alice Manfred**, suffer the consequences of living a life that is dissociated from the memories of the past.

The **absence** of a strong **parental presence** in **Jazz** ties together many of Morrison's characters and connects their shared sadness to one cause. And 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 comes through **Joe Trace**.

Like his wife, Violet, Joe's suffering stems in large part from his **unstable** and **painful childhood**. At a young age, Joe is told that he was adopted and that his mother left him **"without a trace."** He never knew his parents and his "orphanhood" is defined by his "trace" of a memory. A feeling of abandonment and uncertainty about his identity plagues Joe from that moment on.

Golden Gray and Violet have each lost a parent, while Joe and Dorcas have lost both parents in fires and riots. **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.

“Alice had been reraising her, correcting her, since the summer of 1917, and although her earliest memory when she arrived from East St. Louis was the parade her aunt took her to, a kind of funeral parade for her mother and her father, Dorcas remembered it differently”.

Also, **Golden Gray** was in search of his father because Golden Gray is the result of forbidden love between a white woman and a black man. With his golden curls and light skin, Golden looks completely white and he is raised to believe that he is so. His mother does not claim him as her own but says that he was adopted. When his nurse, True Belle, tells him the truth of his parentage, Golden's sense of his own identity is destroyed. He sets out to hunt down and kill his father because he assumes that the black man violated his mother. Morrison wrote about Golden Gray as

“How clever he was and how perfect a gentleman. The hilarious grown-up comments he made when a child and the cavalierlike courage he showed when he was a young man and went to fond, then kill, if he was lucky, his father”.

Raised by aunts, grandparents, and adoptive parents, Violet, Joe, and Dorcas all experience a **feeling of displacement**, and feel that they are handed over with no control. Unable to control the fact that they are orphans and placed in homes without any choice in the matter, characters are relocated in a way that resonates with the paternalistic adoption of slaves. Their true parents would be the tie to history and would provide an identity for the characters. Thus, the lack of parents creates the



characters' sense of displacement and their obsessive desire to find a stable and complete identity.

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.

The Role of Music in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

In Toni Morrison's *Jazz* the music operates thematically as well as formally in order to give a structure to the whole narrative. Morrison had been surrounded by music, specifically Jazz and Blues throughout her childhood. She said during an interview, "*We played music all the time*". Following the tradition of the Black writers such as **Langston Hughes**, **Zora Neale Hurston**, and **James Baldwin**, Morrison uses the vehicles of content, language, form, or a blending of all three to convey the musical experience. The music from the genres of the black folk, gospel, jazz, and the blues appear as a motif which is inextricable from the plot in her works. Morrison's *Jazz* focuses on the central idea, emotions, and aural idiosyncrasies of the music and incorporates in with the plot thematically as well as structurally. The very title of the novel alludes to the genre of the music, Jazz, which is a **cultural heritage** of African Americans. Jazz takes plays a pivotal role in the story through the lives of its main characters and through the life in the City (Harlem) itself. The music plays the role of the essential narrator in the novel.

The role of music in *Jazz* is different from that in the previous works of Morrison. In her previous novels, jazz served as a soundtrack for the events in the life of the characters. On the other hand, the stories of the characters play as backup to the dazzling rendition and improvisation of the music itself in *Jazz*. Though, unnamed, jazz is the **narrator** of the novel. It keeps on shifting its role while narrating the story of the main characters and the City. It speaks with a human voice but lacks a human form. It even declares, "*I haven't got any muscles*". It possesses a keen knowledge of the thoughts, emotions, and actions of the characters. In keeping with its shifting voice, the narrator is at once both male and female. The narrator's jazz-like identity is fully realized in the City. The musical language is employed when the narrator is describing the cityscape and the lives of its people.

"Blues man. Black and bluesman. Blacktherefore blue man. Everybody knows your name. Where-did-she-go-and-why man. So-lonesome-I-could-die man. Everybody knows your name."

Jazz depicts music as a **tool of self-expression** for the Black community as well as a reason of **stigmatization of Black culture** in the City. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the migration of the African American community from the South towards the cities provided them with a greater sense of freedom. Violet and Joe move to the City as a couple in 1906 and experience a sense of freedom greatly even before reaching their destination. They spend of half of their journey on train dancing to the music only they can hear,

"Joe stood up, his fingers clutching the baggage rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way, and told Violet to do the same. They were hanging there, a young country couple, laughing and tapping back at the track".

Jazz also expresses **the female desire for freedom**. This role of music is evident in the life of Dorcas. Dorcas is a young woman who moved to the city as a child at the turn of the century after both of her parents had been killed in the East St. Louis riots. Back then, she witnessed a march on Fifth Avenue with her aunt Alice. Like Alice, it moved her deeply, but she draws different conclusions about the beating of the drums:



"Resisting her aunt's protection and restraining hands, Dorcas thought that life-below-the sash as all the life there was. The drums she heard at the parade were only the first part, the first word, of a command. For her the drums were not an all-embracing rope of fellowship, discipline and transcendence. She remembered them as a beginning, a start of something she looked to complete".

While Alice sees the drums on Fifth Avenue as a sign of solemn connection among the Black citizens, Dorcas finds the freedom and the courage in them to start living her life the way she wants to. Music enters Dorcas' everyday life mostly through entertainment and night clubs. The narrator describes the role music has in the lives of people who visit these clubs:

"They believe they know before the music does what their hands, their feet are to do, but that illusion is the music's secret drive: the control it tricks them into believing is theirs; the anticipation it anticipates".

Dorcas craves for a complete control over her identity and therefore rebels against the protection of her aunt by starting an affair with Joe, who is of her father's age. She derives great pleasures from her rebellious actions.

Morrison also depicts jazz music as a tool for protest and fight for the civil rights of the Black community. For example, Alice Manfred, Dorcas' aunt, witnesses the march of the Black people in 1917. *"It was July in 1917 and the beautiful faces were cold and quiet; moving slowly into the space the drums were building for them."* On July 28, 1917, ten thousand people marched to protest the lynching and the police treatment of black people across the Southern states. Besides the role of music in the civil rights protest of the Black community, *Jazz* also depicts music in the role of stigmatizing the Black culture. For example, Alice notices the negative role of music in the lives of people, specifically young black women. She regards music as a tool of overtly sexual behavior of young black women. She is of the view that music is causing trouble in her society:

Alice thought the lowdown music had something to do with the silent black women and men marching down Fifth Avenue to advertise their anger over two hundred dead in East St. Louis, two of whom were her sister and brother-in-law, killed in the riots.

Regarding Dorcas, Alice thinks that music tempts young black women to *"live a little"*, act in a way that they are not supposed to, thus putting themselves in real danger. Her fears are not unfounded; her niece is, after all, killed in an underground club that most likely plays this type of music. Thus, Alice fears that there is a real danger in young black women going out to nightclubs and expressing their sexuality.

In a nutshell, Morrison has used music to present the complexity of the lives of the Black community in the early twentieth century. At one hand, jazz represents the newly found opportunities and freedom of the Black community. On the other hand, it represents the discrimination and racism faced by the same community in America.

Extra Textual Lines

- *Like the others, they were country people, but how soon country people forget. When they fall in love with a city, it is for forever, and it is like forever.*
- *There is no air in the City but there is breath, and every morning it races through him like laughing gas brightening his eyes, his talk, and his expectations.*
- *Breathing hurts in weather that cold, but ... it is worth anything to be on Lenox Avenue safe from fays and the things they think up; where the sidewalks... are wider than the*



main roads of the towns where they were born.

- *But that's not all a city sky can do. It can go purple and keep an orange heart so the clothes of the people on the streets glow like dance-hall costumes.*
- *The City thinks about and arranges itself for the weekend: the day before payday, the day after payday, the pre-Sabbath activity, the closed shop and the quiet school hall; barred bank vaults and offices locked in darkness.*
- *The City, in its own way, gets down for you, cooperates, smoothing its sidewalks, correcting its curbstones, offering you melons and green apples on the corner.*
- *The City took away the back and arm power she used to boast of.*
- *Or if it was the City that produced a crooked kind of mourning for a rival young enough to be a daughter.*
- *And when spring comes to the City people notice one another in the road...It's the time of year when the City urges contradiction most.*
- *Nobody says it's pretty here; nobody says it's easy either. What it is decisive, and if you pay attention to the street plans, all laid out, the City can't hurt you.*
- *I have seen the City do an unbelievable sky...But there is nothing to beat what the City can make of a night sky.*

Toni Morrison's comments on Jazz

It was not entertainment for us, I woke up to the sound of my mother's voice...It was support system for us and it was powerfully influencing on me.

I was really writing a book, I wanted to read. I hadn't seen a book in which black girls were center staged.

The book about the people who didn't know they were living in an era

Jazz was for ordinary people, jazz is ordinary people. Jazz is not even jazz. I never used the term in the book

Redefine African American experience how it fits into American experience.

