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## Toni Morrison's Flight Complex In The Novel Song Of Solomon

Essential Question: What does Toni Morrison mean when at the conclusion of Song of Solomon she says “it did not matter whether milkman or guitar died in the arms of his brother . . . you surrender to the air you could ride it.” What are things that impede flight, enable flight? And how does milkman acquire knowledge between the two?

Toni Morrison, in the Song of Solomon, uses a flight motif to depict the figurative and allegorical image of flight as a means of escaping throughout the novel. The characters who experience flight are all trying to escape difficult circumstances and prevent tragedies, but through this avoidance, tragedies become inherent. The complexity of the flight motif revolves around the tragedies that are born; each time an individual tries to escape the consequences of their actions become more apparent as it tends to affect those the characters care most about. Moreover, the decision to escape results in the decision to abandon prior existence (social atmosphere). Toni Morrison first introduces the flight motif as a concept of escaping in the novel's epigraph: “The fathers may soar/ And the children may know their names,” these articulations establish the devastating effects of escaping, reinforcing the concept that flight as a means of escape insights more harm than can be seen. When a father leaves (soars), the children may know their name, suggesting that the children may become aware of who their fathers are. However, this is not necessarily the case, the children may not become aware of their father's existence which can contribute to a host of issues (self-hatred, anxiety, anger, etc . . . ) The way in which flight as a means of escape is used and the effects on other characters vary. Some characters use flight to escape without abandoning those they love, whilst others use flight as a means to escape which in turn abandons those they love. Ultimately this essay will examine Milkman's character development and understanding of the concept of flight, while also examining what impedes and enables flight throughout Toni Morrison's magnificent construction of the Song of Solomon.

Toni Morrison begins the novel with the accounts of Robert Smith's and his conceptual idea of flight. Robert Smith is an insurance man the entire community watched, as he promised to “take off from Mercy and fly away on [his] own wings” (Morrison 3) and attempt suicide. Furthermore, Robert Smith had a literal understanding of flight prior to his death. Toni Morrison states that Mr. Smith had “learned earlier - that only birds and airplanes could fly . . .” (Morrison 9). This implies that up until Robert Smith leaps from the hospital, he believed that his ability to fly was similar to other things. Yet, it was not until after his leap, did he realize that flight was not possible. But by then it was too late, Robert Smith had already died. Toni Morrison introduces Robert Smith's suicide, to establish the first reason people enable flight. The first reason flight is enabled is to escape overwhelming situations. Lastly, Toni Morrison foreshadows the association between flight and disappearance in the suicide of Robert Smith. Prior to Robert Smith's death, a woman begins to sing a song that follows “O Sugarman done fly/ O Sugarman done gone” suggesting that when things fly away they leave other things behind (gone) (Morrison 9). Toni Morrison uses the first encounter of a character to establish this belief of flight and creates the first reason people seek flight (as a means to escape).

The story of Solomon fabricates Milkman's understanding of flight, along with the residents of

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his town. Solomon was a slave who flew home to escape slavery. The story is told that through flight, Solomon was able to escape his abhorrent condition. Toni Morrison proclaims that Solomon launched himself into the air, “cut across the sky,” and “gone home” (Morrison 303). Ultimately this myth would shape the outcome of many who lived in that community. In addition, the story of Solomon introduces the risk of flight. When Solomon escaped and became free through flight, his family was left behind to live in an environment without him. Solomon’s wife Ryna, “fell down on the ground...[and] threw her body all-around” in grief (Morrison 303). Ryna’s emotions suggest that pain is involved with Solomon’s flight. When one flies away, those who love them have to live with the burden of their absence and you can see this idea through Ryna’s emotions. Even though there are many outcomes to one’s flight, the pain associated with flight can outweigh freedom. Leaving people to consider if the flight is worth it after all? Through Solomon and Robert Smith’s experience with flight, Milkman’s journey/experience with understanding flight begins.

Milkman’s journey for self-discovery and understanding of flight stems from the stories of Robert Smith and Solomon, which ultimately result in Milkman experiencing the phenomenon of flight. Milkman became the first “colored baby...born inside Mercy [Hospital], following the death of Robert Smith.” There’s a link between the two characters that go beyond the “blue wings”, both men discover that only birds and airplanes could fly (Morrison 9 ). As a result of Milkman’s discovery, “he lost all interest in himself” (Morrison 9) suggesting that he no longer knew who he was for the truth that was widely accepted by everyone was not true. If the flight was possible, and Solomon flew, why are only birds and airplanes allowed to fly? This conceptual difference makes Milkman become fascinated with the idea of alienation and escape. Throughout Toni Morrison’s brilliant composition of *Literature*, Milkman doubts flight; an idea widely accepted by everyone in his community (Due to the story of Solomon). Milkman finds that in order for him to come to terms with this truth, he will have to experience it.

To Conclude, Toni Morrison’s flight complex is presented throughout the piece as a means for escape, finding one-self, and accepting the truth. Ultimately it is not until someone can accept the truth that they become free and take flight. The Song of Solomon presents various of ideas, but none more important than the idea of flight.