
Struggle for Existence in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study is to examine the philosophical perspective that Toni Morrison employed when creating the primary characters in *Song of Solomon*. This article examines the philosophical foundations of the novel at hand by Toni Morrison. It is precisely this aspect that pertains to man's very existence and being. Existentialism is a philosophical and literary school of thought. It focuses on individual liberty and responsibility as two fundamental aspects of man's existence. Existentialism is present both in literature and philosophy. This study provides an in-depth analysis of the *Song of Solomon* text. In this novel, Morrison places Milkman and Pilate in situations from which they can proceed in a variety of ways. The existential aspect of the book will be analyzed by focusing on the struggles that both of the main characters confront when attempting to make decisions about the course of their lives and overcoming obstacles. Morrison's method will be evaluated based on her ability to weave the preexisting social and cultural situations of the main characters into the fabric of numerous societies. Milkman's unwillingness to be controlled by conventional codes and his desire to adapt to the needs of his new being, both of which are emphasized in the study, are illuminated by the research. The research will concentrate on the two characters' distinct conceptions of who they are, as well as the perspective from which each character views the surrounding community, its morals and values, and the societal expectations placed on its members.

Keywords: freedom, existentialism, meaninglessness, struggle, philosophy.

Introduction

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that originated as a reaction to man's awareness of the meaninglessness or absurdity of existence. It calls for a fresh outlook on life and an alternative course of action to ensure one's continued existence. It underlines that man is independent from the values of his society and that he must establish new values for himself in order to survive in a world that is materialistic. Due to the fact that it offers such a fresh perspective on life, existentialism has been instrumental in shaping the work of a wide variety of authors from all over the world. Existentialism requires making free decisions based on one's own requirements and commitments to the results of such actions. These decisions must be made in accordance with one's own requirements.

Existentialism is a philosophical school of thought that contends that people create their own realities by charting the paths of their own lives and accepting responsibility for the choices they make. Developing a new identity or being is similar to deciding on a new set of values and truths by which to live one's life (Heidegger, n.d.)

Toni Morrison, who was born in 1930, is widely regarded as one of the most accomplished authors of African-American descent. The majority of the works that she has produced centre on the author's search for a life that is free and authentic. Morrison's writings, which have been translated into a large number of languages, are read by people from all different backgrounds. Because Morrison was raised in a town that was both ethnically and racially segregated, as well as because she was actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement, her writings have a distinct tone and style. Her writings are significantly more sophisticated and philosophical than those of her peers, despite the fact that she is not the first African-American novelist to tackle the question of man's existence.

Existentialism and Philosophy of Existence

Existentialist philosophy requires that philosophical studies be directly applicable to the individual's lived experience. It should have a philosophy that honors and promotes life. The idea of existence contains everything that has been mentioned. Existentialists place a strong emphasis on the individual's subjective experience. This leads one to the conclusion that the personal is what is real for a particular person. Because of this, philosophical investigation should begin with a person's innate wisdom and experiences because these must be taken into account as proof. (Sartre, n.d.).

Existentialism recognizes each person's unique life experiences. As a consequence of this, it is seen to be a philosophy of being, as well as a philosophy of acceptance and testimony, as well as a philosophy that contests efforts to theorise about and rationalise being. However, this raises the question of whether or not human beings have an essence. Existentialism is most often recognisable by the famous aphorism "existence comes before essence," which was penned by the modern French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre. This aphorism emphasizes that humanity does not have a preset essence other than that which it develops for itself. According to Sartre again, "Man first is – only afterwards is he this or that. Man must create for himself his own essence" (Cited in Roubiczek, 121). It is an evolving character trait that is still in the process of defining and shaping itself. Nietzsche challenges this viewpoint by pointing out that the only things that can be defined are those that do not have a history. Similarly, Sartre states, "It is in the nature of an intellectual quest to be undefined. To name it and define it is to wrap it up and tie the knot" (Cited in Solomon, 244).

Discussion

Song of Solomon was the third novel that Toni Morrison had written and it was published in 1977. Both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Friends of American Writers Award were bestowed upon it when it was announced as the winner. Milkman Dead tells the story of a young man with very traditional values who eventually reaches a point in his life where he feels the need to find out what his life is supposed to be about. The existence of Milkman progresses from one of total reliance on other people to one of independence. In other words, Milkman abandons the practice of doing what other people want him to do in favor of undertaking all of his responsibilities on his own in order to increase the significance of his life.

Despite his drive for worldly wealth, Milkman is interested in history and seeks to learn more about it. When he was younger, he made the people around him seem like the most knowledgeable people in the world. The search for the gold that his father told him about takes up the majority of his thoughts and energy. This concentration, however, changes to the search for his family's forebears and the history of their family. Milkman wants to dodge the responsibility of doing anything major with his life, so he decides to go on a journey that was planned out for him by his father and is backed by his close friend Guitar. Throughout the course of the story, Milkman gives off the impression that he is evading responsibility rather than avoiding it. Milkman goes from being inauthentic to being authentic throughout the course of his adventure to discover the origins of his family. It is essential for him to cultivate, in the words of Doreatha Mabalía (1991): “a strong and centered sense of self, one that accepts responsibility for the past and extends love to others” (p. 55). As a direct result of this, he decides to take a trip out of Michigan in order to get away from the neighborhood in which he lives.

The belief of existentialists is that human beings are born into obscurity. In other words, they do not have any views or beliefs when they are born. On the other hand, they are endowed from birth with the ability to reflect and think deeply about the world that surrounds them, which grants them the ability to fashion something from nothing. To put it another way, every man has the responsibility of making decisions since he was given the freedom to choose and the authority to act when he was formed. But, in order to have such freedom, one must also take on certain responsibilities:

Human beings are wholly free and they are also wholly responsible for what they make of themselves. This responsibility is accompanied by anxiety and sometimes hopelessness which result in a human being choosing a pre-determined way of life or choosing to remove themselves from the world and live in self-imposed isolation (Holman, 1988. P. 176).

The protagonist in *Song of Solomon* is put in a position where he must make choices regarding his ancestors based on the knowledge and information provided to him by other characters in the book. Milkman must learn to take responsibility for his own fate as he develops from childhood into adulthood. He needs to cultivate a sense of who he is that is founded on his own expectations. As Milkman continues his search for the rumored riches on behalf of his father, he begins to question the validity of his father's request. He is no longer committed to the political philosophy of his father. He gradually comes to the realisation that in order to live a genuine life, he must realise the potential he has to live a life of his own, which is exemplified by his decision to investigate his roots. He starts to have faith in himself and accepts responsibility for cultivating his own sense of self-worth and working towards achieving it.

Morrison wants to draw attention to the problem of existential freedom through the story of Solomon, the flying African. This independence places the ultimate responsibility to choose one's own path in life on the individual. Morrison creates a myth in a historical setting to emphasise identity based on personal freedom. To depict the struggle for such independence and identity within the backdrop of historical conditions, she deftly blends the events of Solomon's story. In this situation, Milkman represents the ideals of his culture. Morrison draws here key linkages in her manipulation of existential issues by adjusting myth to the black historical context. The importance of connecting with one's heritage in order to understand one's actual identity and build a higher level of living is something Morrison wants to emphasise as “one that does not necessarily include or prelude material wealth” (Samuels, 1990, p. 8).

The idea of moving on is the overarching theme of *Song of Solomon*. It connotes freedom, either metaphorically or physically. While exploring his family history, Milkman discovers that his forefathers were African slaves who sought to escape to Africa so that to save themselves from slavery. Those who were forced to remain in servitude as a result of Milkman's grandfather's decision to escape it did not come out ahead. In other words, his decision to flee was irresponsible since he never gave any thought to the possibility of realizing his potentials in terms of contributing to the preservation of the ideals of the community in which he resided. In a similar vein, Milkman used to centre his existence around helping other people. He followed in the footsteps of his careless predecessors and set out on a hunt for gold rather than investigating his family history. Samuels and Hudson (1990) remark “Milkman is the spiritual and biological heir of Solomon who rebelled against his bondage in slavery with his flight back to Africa” (p.77).

Morrison's goal in *Song of Solomon* is to give the protagonist an authentic demeanor. She desires to emphasize that Milkman bears the ultimate responsibility and decision-making authority. She is very concerned about the roles he will play in determining the course of his life. She wishes to emphasize once more that self-actualization and personal liberty can only be accomplished through individual actions. She also wishes to disclose the complexity of the struggle for the self's essence. In other words, she wishes to convey that the pursuit of an authentic existence necessarily entails the pursuit of truth, survival, love, and even authority. Morrison makes this clear through the direct and indirect lessons Milkman learns from his family.

Milkman is brought up in a household that has a negative outlook on life, and as he gets older, he takes on the beliefs of his parents and aunt. After the Civil War, an intoxicated white soldier made the unfortunate error of giving the family the surname "Dead." This is a crucial fact to keep in mind. In order to live as an independent man, as his name suggests, Milkman needs to triumph over the challenges he faces in his spiritual life. In addition to this, it is a symbol of the dominance that the white world has over the black world. Macon Dead II, Milkman's father, is the son of a man who was formerly a slave but rose up through the ranks to become a successful proprietor. He and his sister were present when their father was brutally murdered by local whites. He witnessed the entire thing. After being chased from their home and forced to run, the two are able to make it across the forest with the help of Circe, a slave who belonged to the same family as the killers of their father, Macon Dead I. When their older brother killed a white miner, their little sister and brother lived in constant terror. They went their separate ways and are never seen again.

Macon Dead II, who had just turned four years old at the time, helped his father with farm chores on the family property. Despite this, the murder of the father affects his perspective on how he should live his life. He is completely destitute now. He is going to leave the estate and go to another location. He makes the discovery that a piece of land has value on both a material and a spiritual level. The things that Macon takes in are of an exceedingly materialistic nature. It was his assertion that "money is freedom; the only true freedom" (Morrison, 1977, p.179). Macon is under the impression that he does not own himself since he has let his belongings hold him captive. He is going to pass on his convictions and wisdom to his progeny. His advice is that, "You want to be a whole man, you have to deal with the whole truth: Couldn't be a whole man without knowing all that" (Morrison, 1977; p. 87). Macon Dead II believes that an individual's identity may be deduced from their likelihood of achieving their goals. It also justifies his conduct in the past and in the present. Macon's attitude towards life is so materialistic that he fails to recognize that his history is an essential component of who he is today. He is committed to the principles of the West, which are completely materialistic. The number of possessions that someone has accumulated is how he and others define themselves. The ownership of Macon Dead II is given more weight than the production of

the game. He is no longer in control of himself since his goods have the power to enslave him. Magill (1992) conveys in the following lines: “After the murder of his father, Macon Dead II has resolved to win a place for himself in a conventional society. He has tied himself to a world that is corrupt and, as a result, he has infected himself and his family with hatred and contempt” (Magill, 1992, p.513)

Macon believes that existence is nothing more than the accumulation of wealth and material goods. To be wealthy is to have complete possession of everything. There is no denying that Milkman's persona has been significantly shaped by the idea that he adheres to. According Susan Willis (1993): “Milkman is belittled by his father who gives him a role in his exploitative business dealing and who regards his son as an extension of his own needs. As such, Milkman grows up in an exaggerated patriarchal microcosm” (Willis, 1993, p.141). Macon's existence is defined by a preoccupation with amassing fortune and, by extension, power. This is the driving force behind all he does. He cares more about money than he does about himself. According to Byerman (1993), “Macon Dead II distorted the values of his father by emphasizing possession over creation.” (Byerman, 1993; p.115). By engaging in fund-raising, he hopes to dodge the burden of confronting the challenges that he is required to face, which is his existential goal. To put it more succinctly, Macon Dead II leads a life that is not genuine. He is driven by a strong aspiration to amass a great deal of material success.

At the age of sixteen, Ruth weds Macon Dead II, who will eventually take over the management of her father's estate. She was in a marriage that lacked passion on either side. She gives birth to two daughters, but Milkman is the lone son of the three children. Macon will never have a loving partner, and he engages in both verbal and physical abuse towards her. Clearly, the husband's attitude deepens his wife's emotional ties to her late father, and this has a positive effect on their relationship. Ruth goes to the tomb of her father at night in order to retain her love for him by maintaining communication with him through the afterlife. She comes to the conclusion that she should “press her into a small package” and move into her father's expansive and lovely home (Morrison, 1977; p.137). She never stops yielding to others. The following phrases are examples of how she conveys the love and respect she has great love and respect for her father. “It is important for me to be in his presence, among his things, the things he used, had touched. Later it was just important for me to know that he was in the world” (Morrison, 1977; p. 138). Overall, she pursues authentic existence in this way. Little is available from Ruth. She never considers how she might design her own existence; instead, she exists for others. She is a woman of “bad faith” in terms of her existence since she puts other people before herself. Morrison underlines in this section the effects of a choice that is not genuine since it is made for ‘the other’.

Milkman is shown in the first part of the novel as a spoilt, self-centered, puzzled, and immature young man who is strongly impacted by the hostile atmosphere in his house and family. This segment of the story takes place in the early part of the book. It indicates that he is well aware of his own individuality and independence. Milkman is unable to conceptualize himself as a part of the whole since he does not fully understand the scope of the function that will be assigned to him. He is completely bereft of any feeling of purpose other than the pursuit of comfort: "He had won something and lost something in the same instant. Infinite possibilities and enormous responsibilities stretched out before him, but he was not prepared to take advantage of the former, nor accept the burden of the latter. So he cock-walked around the table" (Morrison, 1977; p. 168).

Milkman's journey begins when he is twelve years old. He lives in Michigan for the first 30 years of his life. He has trouble forming close relationships with everyone he meets. At one point he confides in his friend Guitar: "Daddy wants me to be like him and hate my mother. My mother wants me to think like her and hate my father. Corinthians (his elder sister) won't speak to me; Lena (younger sister) wants me out. And Hagar (his cousin) wants me chained to her bed or dead. Everyone wants something from me" (Morrison, 1977; p. 242).

Macon Dead II tells Milkman the story of how he and his sister Pilate hid down in a cave after learning that their father, Macon Dead I, had been murdered by a white man. Macon Dead I was responsible for the death of the white man. The brother believes that Pilate will later come back to look for the gold, which was in a green sack that Milkman took, only to find out that it contained bones. Even after they have gone, the brother holds on to this belief. Milkman, who is fixated on collecting the gold, sets off on a journey to do so with the support of his close friend Guitar. He does this because he is determined to get his hands on it. In this particular scenario, Milkman's quest of riches serves as a metaphor for the worldview that he and his father both hold. Milkman is under the impression that his history, which is symbolized by the sack of gold, will free him from the constraints of having an identity once he has left his hometown. Valerie Smith claims that he has the misconception that acquiring gold will give him a "clean-lined definite self, the first sense of identity he has ever known" (Gates, 281) Because of this, Milkman's self-acquired conception of freedom is erroneous. He is under the impression that wealth will enable him to live independently, and he has no intention of submitting to the authority of anyone, including his own father. He sees it as a way "beating a path away from his parents' past" (Morrison, 1977; p. 181)

Throughout his journey, Milkman fights against an identity that has been imposed on him by others. After discovering that the treasure he was looking for was actually a bag of bones, Macon decides to send his son back to Pennsylvania, the location where he believes the gold was buried. Milkman goes to Shalimar in an effort to recreate the journey that Pilate took and find the concealed riches, but he is ultimately unsuccessful. In this

context, the search for gold takes on a different significance. According to Susan Willis (1993), it represents a hunt for “the only unfetishized form of value and, in an allegorical sense, the retrieval of unfetishized human relationships” (Willis, 1993; p.217). Milkman does not have an acceptable level of self-awareness. His understanding of his connection with the people around him is insufficient to give him a genuine perspective of what happened in the past. His identity is shattered and scattered all over the place, “It was all very tentative, the way he looked, like a man peeping around a corner of some place he is not supposed to be, trying to make up his mind whether to go forward or to turn back” (Morrison, 1977; p. 170).

The first part of Milkman's journey indicates that he is an existential figure living a life of inauthenticity. This is shown to be the case which is viewed in light of the numerous experiences that are provided to him by other characters. His time spent with his parents is the part of his life that feels the least genuine to him. In addition, Milkman seems to be acting in ‘bad faith’ in his relationships with Guitar and Hagar, as he is attempting to absolve himself of responsibility for the outcomes of his extramarital activities with Hagar. Guitar and Hagar's relationship looks to have been negatively impacted as a result.

At the age of 30, Milkman shows signs of wanting to make a change. In light of his current yearning for self-realization, he finds himself at a fork in the road where he obliged to choose the path that he will take in the future. He considers himself nothing more than a possession that belongs to his parents. That is to say, in the past he had the habit of leading a life devoid of direction and meaning for the sake of others and carrying out their goals. Now, he asserts, “I want to live my own life” (Morrison, 1977; p. 225) and takes charge of his own life by making this decision. He realises that he needs an unconventional approach in order to survive. In fact, his statement is an existential assertion that stands for one's own individuality and liberty.

Earlier, Milkman lacked passion for the opportunities available in his town. In the end, he does everything in his power to stand out. He has a new insight that his father's existence is meaningless and unimportant to the world. Milkman's mother does not want her son to grow up and become an adult. As he grows older, he comes to the conclusion that she is a naive and self-absorbed individual. He finds out that she does not have a unique personality and that she does not have much to offer him. Milkman begins his search for individual existence. He states, “What good is a man's life if he can't even choose what to die for?” (Morrison, 1977; p. 243). He departs in quest of his grandfather's original residence. Yet, his mission is ambivalent. Because he desires the gold that he believes his aunt Pilate has concealed. On the other hand, he desires to know his family's true history. The act of identification by Milkman can be interpreted as an act of differentiation. His new realization gives his life and being new significance. Morrison seems to emphasize the significance of existential liberation once more. It is an individual's responsibility to determine the course of his or her existence.

In addition, Morrison wants to stress the importance of individual acts as the key to achieving emancipation and self-actualization. In this context Willis (1993) asserts “although Milkman cannot achieve identity without recognizing community, the identity he achieves is individual” (p. 69) Milkman gets the last say in everything that's decided; however, he is required to take responsibility in exchange for his freedom. Instead of seeking out monetary gain or engaging in irresponsible behavior, he makes the decision to pursue history and assume responsibility. Milkman will finally be free if he acknowledges his new status. Cynthia A. Davis believes that, “by conceiving his self as both a free individual and a member of the social group, the hero unites his free and factitious natures and becomes part of the historical process by which the struggle for self-actualization is both complicated and fulfilled (Davis, 1990; p. 17).

Again, Morrison stresses individual liberty and freedom by situating movement within the framework of its communal relationship. During the second part of his journey, Milkman feels a sense of liberation from the standards set by his family. Because of this, his mission shifts from one focused solely on material gain to one focused on gaining information in order to figure out who he is at his core. Krumholz (1997) makes the observation that “Milkman’s quest for freedom changes from the freedom obtained through the solitary power of money to the freedom gained through connections to others, imaginative engagement and love” (Krumholz, 1997; p.109). In a metaphoric sense, Milkman has the desire to soar into the air just like his great-grandfather did. During the course of this flight, he realises that he is capable of achieving his goals. The history of his ancestors provides him with the key to unlocking the meaning he seeks. In this particular setting, Smith asserts that “Knowing oneself derives from learning to reach back into history in relationship to others. Milkman bursts the bonds of the Western, individualistic conception of self, accepting in its place the richness and complexity of a collective sense of identity” (Gates, 1993; p.283).

Before this, Macon Dead II had delegated Milkman to retrieve the green sack from the ceiling of Pilate's residence, where he believed it was hidden along with the treasure. After discovering that the so-called treasure was actually just a sack of bones, he dispatches Milkman to Pennsylvania, where he believes the wealth is still hidden. Milkman makes his way to Shalimar, the location of his ancestors' original settlement, in the hope of recreating Pilate's journey and finding the buried treasure there.

Circe, a former servant for the family whose leader earlier murdered Milkman's grandfather, Macon Dead I, accompanies Milkman on his journey to Shalimar and provides him with assistance along the way. Circle gives him important knowledge that he can use to understand the history of his family. Milkman follows Circe's information to the grotto where his grandfather was killed, and once there, he confronts the murderer. Milkman finds out, with the help of his aunt, Pilate, that the bones in the bundle do not belong to the white man whom Macon had killed, but rather to his grandfather. Milkman gets this information while in the presence of his

aunt. Milkman, with the help of Pilate, makes the decision to bring the bones back to the cave so that they can be buried appropriately. The next thing that Milkman does, is consulting Circe regarding the objective of his search. She brings to mind the connection between his great-great-grandfather's given name, "Solomon," and the name of his father.

To move forward with genuine understanding, Milkman have to let go of all of his old values and come up with his own set of values. In order for him to come up with his own set of truths, he has to get rid of the flimsy ideas that he picked up from other people. While he is there, he will participate in a wide variety of activities that are organised by the locals of Shalimar, and as a result, he will arrive to a fresh understanding of who he is. Now, the memories of the past are all around him. Benston suggests that "in the second part of *Song of Solomon*, Milkman renews the traditional search for the properly-named self in a journey which turns upon his own choice" (as cited in Spillers, 1999; p. 102). Milkman must educate himself in a different sort of literacy. It is necessary for him to gather information that is essential to his own existence. He is able to see beyond what is constrained and familiar now that he possesses this information. According to Russell (1988), "Morrison achieves an unusually skillful transition from a precisely described Michigan town into a timeless mythological world of quest for meaning and identity. Milkman develops from an indulged and self-indulging child into a dangerously won maturity" (Russell, 1988; p. 30).

Milkman comes to the realisation that the only way for him to find out who he is to learn about his family. Milkman is able to accomplish all that he set out to do because he convinces himself that he is free. By merging the two concepts, he establishes his identity in both subjective freedom and factual realities. The most crucial thing that Milkman learns is that the only way for him to be free is to make a commitment to something. When he returns to Shalimar, he becomes friends with some of the residents there. He is of the opinion that he has his own identity and struggle while being a male. While in Shalimar, Milkman overhears children chanting rhymes that have some hazy importance to him. He starts a collection of these poems and eventually deciphers them, only to find out that they contain the history of his family. Solomon, a native African who possesses the ability to fly, one day realises that he possesses a magical gift and decides to make use of it in order to travel back to Africa. In order to get away from being a slave, Solomon has left behind his wife and twenty-one children, one of whom is Jake, who is the great-great ancestor of Milkman. As a result, he realises that there is connection between the story and who he is as a person. Milkman's journey of self-discovery and awareness of his own history is greatly aided by the fact that he was able to determine the real name of his great-great grandfather and their family tree. Therefore, in order for Milkman to start understanding who he is, he needs to be able to comprehend, finish, and sing the song of his ancestors.

According to Lee (1990), “he begins to find his treasure, the gift of self-knowledge to his people” (Samuels & Hudson, 1990; p 78). The performance of the children of *Song of Solomon* is the key to uncovering his link to "Jay" or Jake, the son of Solomon whose return to Africa is celebrated in the song. When Milkman hears the name of his great-great ancestor, he experiences a sense of liberation from the confining materialistic values of his ancestors' past. He believes that the piece is rich with symbolic underpinnings. In this context, the message of the song corresponds to Milkman's growing knowledge of the strengths he possesses. Now that he has this newfound knowledge, he is under the impression that he is free to fly. It is so important to him that he is willing to lay down his life for it.

As a result, Milkman comes upon something that is more valuable than gold during the course of his journey. This insight enables him to begin to realise who he is in the present and opens the door to a future of freedom that will allow him to mimic his legendary grandfather. Additionally, it enables him to begin to comprehend who he was in the past. As a consequence of this, he now has access to a new legacy, which consists of the capacity to live his life without the need or desire for worldly items. He is freed from the obligation to serve others by either exploiting them or submitting to their will. In other words, Milkman finds out how to achieve genuine independence. Dixon (1990) argues thus: “Now he can ride the air. Milkman's leap of surrender is his ultimate performance, a flight he has earned by doffing his vanities. His leap transcends the rootedness and the freedom he has gained. His flight demonstrates self-mastery and control” (Dixon, 1990; p. 141).

At the end of the novel, Milkman succeeds in reclaiming the identities of his family members and develops the power to fly. The adage that was left to him by his great-great-grandfather is starting to make more sense to him, “he realised at that moment what Shalimar had known the entire time, which is that if you give in to the wind, you can ride it” (Morrison, 1977; p. 363). He comes to the realisation that the only way for him to find his true self is to become free and accept responsibility for that freedom. Because of this, Milkman is finally able to make peace with his ancestors and get an understanding of both their ideology and their conduct. Carmean states:

The escape from the earth- flight- (on the part of Milkman's great grandfather) stands as a symbol for the refusal to be satisfied by a life without choice. At the nadir of his life, Milkman uses whatever available to please his self. And at the conclusion of his quest, he has overcome social and personal enslavement to achieve self-sufficiency and self-regard. Milkman becomes a man whose sense of courage has given his spirit wings (Carmean, 1992; p. 515).

Morrison utilizes the metaphor of flight to represent freedom in her novel *Song of Solomon*. She wants to stress that everyone has access to freedom and that it is their obligation to freely direct their own lives. She also wants to underscore that freedom is a universal right. Again, the problem of existential liberty is Morrison's primary concern in the depiction of Milkman's shift from inauthenticity to authenticity. She is concerned about the roles that Milkman will play in defining the direction that his life will take in the future. It is a life that, according to Samuels & Hudson (1990), "must skirt 'bad faith' and be steeped in the existential responsibility to act" (p.53). Milkman's search for a legacy shifts from being primarily about a monetary inheritance, as illustrated by his father's materialism, to being about a personal inheritance, as exemplified by the song about his ancestor's communal history. Russell (1988) makes the observation that "The hero pursues material gain but instead he finds himself in a quest for his history. The journey eventually gains him spiritual freedom" (Russell, p. 44).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Morrison was successful in creating characters in *Song of Solomon* who could convey existential notions in some way and were universal. This demonstrates Morrison's talent as a writer. Anyone who doesn't feel they have the confidence to live a real life can read and understand the entire book as guidance. It might also be viewed as a strategy for encouraging individuals of all ages to reawaken their unconscious mental and emotional capacities. Everyone is free to develop their own unique theory. Everyone may relate to Milkman's struggle because it is fundamentally about accepting oneself and realizing one's potential.

In *Song of Solomon* Toni Morrison has illustrated the difficulty Milkman faces on his quest for authenticity. She has demonstrated his transition from adolescence to adulthood and his responsibility for determining the course of his existence. Morrison provides Milkman with a diversity of experiences and gives him the freedom to make existentially responsible decisions. According to his individual needs, he assumes control of his fate. He is responsible for creating his own reality or set of truths. Milkman has embraced the values imparted to him by his father, which he has absorbed from society. Initially, Milkman is guided by his father's materialistic value. Later, he has developed his own set of values. In his search for the origin of his ancestors, he realised that he has the potential to live an independent existence. Milkman was ultimately successful in discovering himself and his family's origins as a result of developing a firm belief in his own freedom and assuming responsibility for creating and pursuing his own sense of worth.

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