

Today, when more and more minority groups and marginal groups are fighting for their recognition, the exploration of how Toni Morrison, a spokeswoman for a minority group, encourages her people to move from self-hated to self-regard might be significant, since it draws attention to the view that the genuine recognition for minority groups and marginal groups is based not upon the abandonment of their uniqueness but on the maintenance and development of it. What's more, this love ethic can apply to

# 非裔美国人探求身份之路

## ——对托妮·莫里森的小说研究

胡俊  
●  
著

*A Study of the Identity Pursuit  
of African Americans  
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BEIJING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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——可尼諾·阿摩森的中日研究

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本书获北京语言大学青年学者文库基金资助

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

(京)新登字 157 号

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

非裔美国人探求身份之路——对托妮·莫里森的小说研究 =  
A Study of the Identity Pursuit of African Americans in Toni  
Morrison's Fiction. 英文/胡俊著.  
—北京: 北京语言大学出版社, 2007.5  
ISBN 978-7-5619-1823-4

I. 非…

II. 胡…

III. 莫里森, T. —小说—文学研究—英文

IV. I712.074

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2007) 第 049135 号

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书 名: 非裔美国人探求身份之路——对托妮·莫里森的小说研究 =  
A Study of the Identity Pursuit of African Americans in Toni  
Morrison's Fiction. 英文

责任编辑: 余心乐

责任印制: 包 朔

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出版发行: **北京语言大学出版社**

社 址: 北京市海淀区学院路 15 号 邮政编码 100083

网 址: [www.blcup.com](http://www.blcup.com)

电 话: 发行部 82303648 /3591 /3651

编辑部 82303223

读者服务部 82303653 /3908

印 刷: 北京外文印刷厂

经 销: 全国新华书店

---

版 次: 2007 年 5 月第 1 版 2007 年 5 月第 1 次印刷

开 本: 710 毫米×1000 毫米 1/16 印张: 11

字 数: 171 千字 印数: 1—1000 册

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5619-1823-4 / H·07041

定 价: 26.00 元

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凡有印装质量问题本社负责调换, 电话: 82303590

# 前言

上个世纪中叶以来,美国文坛涌现出一大批少数裔女性作家,包括非裔美国女作家、亚裔美国女作家以及拉美裔美国女作家等。她们的出现更改了美国经典文学的历史。如今,这些少数裔女性作家的作品已经成为美国文学以及美国文化不可或缺的一部分。作为边缘群体的代言人,这些作家有着强烈的政治责任心和使命感,而这种政治责任心和使命感也体现在她们的作品里。通过作品来关注自己所属群体的生存状况和发展方向是这些作家的共同特点。也正是由于她们孜孜不倦的努力,她们所代表的边缘群体逐渐受到更多的关注和认可。在这群多元化的作家当中,于1993年获得诺贝尔文学奖的非裔美国女作家托妮·莫里森可以算是最杰出的一位。

本书尝试从非裔美国人自我憎恨心理的角度来分析托妮·莫里森的小说。很长时期以来,非裔美国人一直都在受着种族问题的困扰。作为一位非裔美国作家,托妮·莫里森不可能对她同族人的命运无动于衷。但在她的作品中,莫里森并没有聚焦于黑人和白人之间的直接冲突,她更感兴趣的是黑人群体内部的问题,这些问题往往是因为小说中的人物违背个人的兴趣、压抑自己的本性以及忽视本族文化、一味模仿主流文化的模式而造成的。通过呈现某些非裔美国人的自我憎恨心理,莫里森试图证明,对白人价值标准的内化以及对黑人身份的放弃是白人种族主义对非裔美国人造成的最大伤害。因此,莫里森希望非裔美国人能够意识到自我肯定的重要性,因为只有承认并发展非裔美国人自己的文化身份,而不是一味地迎合主流文化模式,才是非裔美国人在美国社会获得真正平等的认可的前提条件。

本书共分三章。第一章介绍了莫里森小说中非裔美国人自我憎恨心理的各种表现方式。每一个民族都会有其与众不同的外观或是文化上的

特点。但在莫里森的小说里,为了更好地融入到主流社会,有些非裔美国人试图抹去标明其黑人身份的外观或文化特征。非裔美国人由于其肤色以及其他独特的身体特征,很容易与美国白人区别开来。他们的自我憎恨则往往从他们的身体开始,其表现是试图改变其外观特征。而这些自我憎恨的非裔美国人表现出来的另一个更为重要的特点是对于本民族文化身份的放弃。由于没有意识到本民族祖先对他们的重要性,他们对于黑人群体中的年长者缺乏应有的尊敬;为了向白人文化模式靠拢,他们宁愿压抑自己的情感活力;为了获得个人的心理平衡,他们不惜牺牲同族人的利益,破坏黑人内部的团结。

本书的第二章探究非裔美国人自我憎恨心理的各种起因。莫里森的小说表明,非裔美国人的自我憎恨现象不能仅仅被当作一个性格上的问题来看待,实际上它起源于白人种族主义,正是因为种族主义使得美国黑人无论是对于他们自己还是对于整个黑人群体与白人社会的关系都很难作出真实的判断。种族主义者使用暴力来执行各种法律,以征服和控制非裔美国人,这是一种最粗暴而又最简单易行的方法;而穷困的经济地位也往往使得非裔美国人不得不依靠白人才能生存。白人种族主义者最有效而又最持久地控制非裔美国人的方法是对黑人进行意识形态方面的控制,使黑人接受自己的劣势地位,身不由己地加入到白人种族主义者对自己的伤害中来。

本书的第三章讨论的是莫里森为祛除非裔美国人的自我憎恨心理所提供的治疗方法。一方面,莫里森在其作品中记录了那些以牺牲自己的黑人身份来获得社会认可的非裔美国人;另一方面,她又呈现给我们另一些黑人角色,他们把坚持自己本民族的文化传统当作自己生存的关键。在莫里森的小说中,他们对自己的黑人身份的肯定表现不断出现,并对那些否定自己的黑人身份的表现进行干预。通过帮助非裔美国人认识其自我憎恨心理的危害,莫里森试图鼓励她的同族人热爱、维护并发展自己的民族独有的文化,并以此作为他们身份和力量的真正源泉。

本书首次从非裔美国人自我憎恨心理的角度对托妮·莫里森的小说进行系统的分析。在当下的语境中,当各少数民族群体、各边缘群体都在

为对自己身份的认可进行抗争的时刻,本研究具有其特殊意义。它把注意力引向这样一个方向:即对少数民族群体和边缘群体的身份认可不应以抛弃其群体的独特性为代价,而应是建立在维护并发展本群体的独特性的基础之上。

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# Introduction

Since the 1970s, we have witnessed a remarkable efflorescence of African American literary production, mostly by African American women writers. It is this steady outpouring of African American writing along with the upsurge of other minority literature that has accelerated the reshaping of the American literary canon. Among those writers playing active roles in promoting black voices is Toni Morrison. Deemed as a writer “who, in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality” (Morrison, *Lecture and Speech of Acceptance* 6), Morrison won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. Many critics have focused overwhelmingly on Morrison’s artistic achievements. For example, the renowned literary critic Harold Bloom claims that he “reread[ s ] Morrison because her imagination, whatever her social purposes, transcends ideology and polemics, and enters again into the literary space occupied only by fantasy and romance of authentic aesthetic dignity” (2). Ever since the 1960s, with the rising of various new critical approaches to literature, which try to free readers from the control of the author, traditional ways of reading literature have gradually been abandoned. Yet this separation of the literary text from its author may not work in black literary criticism “because reclaiming an identity and (narrative) voice has been important to the black writer in countering centuries of dispossession and misrepresentation” (Peach 2000 1). For a long time, the voices of black writers have been slighted or ignored in the literary history, when they are just in possession of the opportunity to be heard, and to receive notice, “they do not want to be robbed of it again by a European, theoretical sleight of hand” (Peach 2000 1). This also applies to Morrison. She seems to disapprove of the opinion that her work “transcends ideology and polemics.” On many occasions, Morrison has stressed the political function of art, as for black writ-

ers, they write not merely for aesthetic enjoyment but for the responsibility they think they should take up to speak out for their people. To Morrison, a novel “should be beautiful, and powerful, but it should also work” (“Rootedness” 341) and it “must have something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are” (344), which is an indication of her belief that literature should be aesthetically beautiful as well as politically engaged. In a recent dialogue with the famous black scholar on African-American studies Cornel West, Morrison claimed that she “always took for granted that the best art was political and was revolutionary,” and “the questions being raised were explorations into kinds of anarchy, kinds of change, identifying errors, flaws, vulnerabilities in systems” (“Blues, Love and Politics” 24). Therefore, art is more regarded by Morrison as a vehicle by which she can reveal problems in the society. West has said the following words to Morrison: “When I read your work, I say somebody’s still serious about telling the truth about the country, and it’s painful, it’s unnerving, it’s unhousing, but somebody’s still telling the truth” (“Blues, Love and Politics” 18). That Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize should be attributed not only to her enchanting style but also to her being able to use her artistic talents to “tell the truth” and to reflect “an essential aspect of American reality.” And this “essential aspect of American reality” is none other than the particular plight of African Americans, a group Morrison herself belongs to.

Being an African American herself, Morrison cannot remain indifferent to the plight of her own people, who have long been haunted by the problem of racial inequality. Well conscious of her specific identity, Morrison has never hesitated to render her works in this particular perspective. In an interview with Nellie McKay, she showed her reluctance to be compared with classic white writers:

I am not like James Joyce; I am not like Thomas Hardy; I am not like Faulkner. I am not like in that sense. I do not have objections to being compared to such extraordinarily gifted and facile writers, but it does leave me sort of hanging there when I know that my effort is to be like

something that has probably only been fully expressed in music, or in some other culture-gen that survives almost in isolation because the community manages to hold on to it. Sometimes I can reflect something of this kind in my novels. Writing novels is a way to encompass this—this something. (Mckay 152)

To Morrison, it is her deep rootedness in black culture and her ability to present what is vital to her people that contribute to her success as a writer. What she attempts to do through her work is to speak out “the unspeakable thing”, that is, the racial problem in American society. To borrow Gurleen Grewal’s words, “If Morrison’s writing makes aesthetic sense to the reader, it is not in spite of but because of the ideological vision propelling that art” (xi). The racial problem actually serves a powerful catalyst for Morrison’s work.

The consequences of white racism on black victims have been a recurrent theme among the works of African American writers, with the relations between blacks and whites or the black-white wars in northern cities much dealt with, especially by black male writers. Take two eminent black male writers for instance. While in *Native Son*, Richard Wright presents the shocking story of Bigger Thomas who is driven to dismember a white girl; in *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison delineates the experience of a young black man struggling in the white world. Both books deal with the direct confrontation between blacks and whites. Although also belonging to the group of black writers, Morrison nevertheless perceives a difference between black male and female writers:

There is a gaze that women writers seem to have that is quite fascinating to me because they tend not to be interested in confrontations with white men—the confrontation between black women and white men is not very important, it doesn’t center the text. There are more important ones for them and their look (Davis 1994 230).

This observation can apply to Morrison herself, with her pushing black-white relations to the periphery of her narrative. The focus of Morrison’s fiction is on relationships within black communities: “I’ve only been stimulated to write about black people. We are people, not aliens. We live, we love, and we

die" (Ruas 118), since it is to blacks that she is addressing her work: "Whenever I feel uneasy about my writing, I think: what would be the response of the people in the book if they read the book? That's my way of staying on track. Those are the people for whom I write" (LeClair 121).

One thing interesting about Morrison is that despite being a black proud of her own ancestry, Morrison does not limit her fiction to the mere description of the achievements of her people. On the contrary, her unique identity enables her to penetrate into African Americans, exploring their contributions as well as their problems. Addressing her people directly, Morrison regards her fiction a media by which she can be free in her communication with her people and in expressing her hopes for them. That may explain the reason why rather than idealize her people, Morrison in her fiction attempts to reveal how some African Americans have deeply internalized racist stereotypes and construct themselves accordingly, almost always with disastrous results. In Morrison's novels, issues of race and ethnicity are no longer as simple as the confrontation between whites and blacks but inescapably interweaved with issues of gender, class and other problems within black communities. When talking with Verdelle on her book *Paradise*, Morrison said: "I think the threat for many of our communities is internecine. By that I mean the enemy is within, as opposed to being on the outside. Quarreling within the family" (Verdelle 80). Therefore, dwelling upon the self-hatred of African Americans in her novels may help to better understand how Morrison explores the racial problem in her work.

The Dissertation Abstracts International and also MLA Abstracts International in the past years reveal that Toni Morrison has been one of the most favored writers among researchers on American literature. Owing to her fame, scholarship on Toni Morrison proves to be prolific. Different aspects of her fiction have been studied through different approaches. Feminism is the most commonly used approach because women's fate in Morrison's fiction has been a recurrent theme. Anthropological or cultural approaches come next, with their stresses on Morrison's use of community, folklore, myth and a jazz and/

or blues aesthetic. Marxist criticism has been adopted to analyze Morrison's class consciousness. The recuperation of African-American history in Morrison's fiction has aroused the attention of historians; and psychoanalytic, postmodern and reader-response methodologies are applied to study the other aspects in Morrison's fiction. Among those Ph. D. dissertations focusing on Toni Morrison with the majority comparing her works to those of other writers and the rest totally devoted to her work alone, none undertakes a systematic study of self-hatred in Toni Morrison's fiction, although there are indeed several Ph. D. dissertations related to this theme. Denise Heinze uses Du Bois' view of double-consciousness to analyze Morrison's novels, from which she draws the conclusion that Toni Morrison's oeuvre is influenced by her immersion in two distinct cultures, one American and one Black;<sup>①</sup> Julia Leigh Eichelberger discusses the characters in *The Bluest Eye*, who internalize racist ideology;<sup>②</sup> Joyce Russell Robinson also adopts Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness to analyze *The Bluest Eye*, calling attention to the media and American standards of beauty as factors creating a sense of duality among African Americans;<sup>③</sup> Michele Lisa Simms-Burton discusses intra-racial class contention in *Tar Baby*.<sup>④</sup> Besides these dissertations, there are some books and articles connected to the theme. The books include Philip Page's *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in the Novels of Toni Morrison* and Doreatha Drummond Mbalia's *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness*, with the former analyzing the double-consciousness in Morrison's fiction and the latter referring to intra-racial class prejudices while discussing Morrison's class consciousness. What should also be included on the list is the book *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* by J. Brooks Bouson, in which Bouson discusses the feeling of shame and the painful experience

① *The Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels*. DAI 51 (1991): 8.

② *Ideology and the Individual in Novels by Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Saul Bellow, and Eudora Welty*. DAI 53 (1993): 9.

③ *The Shadow Within: Du Boisian Double Consciousness in Five African-American Novels*. DAI 52 (1992): 12.

④ *Narratives of Black Bourgeois Desire: Examining the Class-Line in Twentieth-Century Black Women's Fiction*. DAI 59 (1998): 4.

rience African Americans go through under the oppression of white racism.

The articles include Judylyn S. Ryan's "Contested Visions/Double-Vision in *Tar Baby*," Roberta Rubenstein's "Pariahs and Community," Michael Awkward's "'The Evil of Fulfillment': Scapegoating and Narration in *The Bluest Eye*," Marilyn Sanders Mobley's "Narrative Dilemma: Jadine as Cultural Orphan in *Tar Baby*," Cynthia A. Davies' "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction," John N. Duvall's "Descent in the 'House of Chloe': Race, Rape, and Identity in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*," Cynthia Dubin Edelberg's "Morrison's Voices: Formal Education, the Work Ethic, and the Bible," Edward Guerrero's "Tracing 'the Look' in the Novels of Toni Morrison," Malin Lavon Walther's "Out of Sight: Toni Morrison's Revision of Beauty," and Elaine Jordan's "'Not My People': Toni Morrison and Identity." These articles either use the theory of double-consciousness to analyze Toni Morrison's novels or discuss intra-racial prejudices.

All of these dissertations, articles and books have been enlightening, but in one way or another, they are still different from what this book attempts to explore. Double-consciousness is a term first introduced by the black scholar W. E. Du Bois almost a hundred years ago:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

(5)

On the one hand, Du Bois attributes the affliction of African Americans to their double-consciousness; yet on the other hand, he regards the double-consciousness as a "gifted second-sight," (5) which means African Americans actually possess more perspectives to view this world. Many critics have tried to analyze Morrison's fiction from the perspective of Du Boisian double-consciousness. Like Du Bois, they noticed the negative as well as positive effects

of double-consciousness on African Americans. In her article “Contested Vision/Double-Vision in *Tar Baby*,” Judylyn S. Ryan contends that

Diversity among human beings guarantees a potentially beneficial range of different visions. However, when these different visions are manipulated to determine and denote advantages (economic, political, and social) and disadvantages, choices available and choices unavailable, these differences accrue an element of contestation. . . . Double-consciousness not only attests to the existence of these contesting visions, but it also reflects a “resolution” of sorts, in the acceptance of the dominant world view on the part of some African-Americans. (600)

These words indicate that double-consciousness can be problematic if a hierarchy is generated among different visions, which will grant advantages to some while denying rights to others. To African Americans, the resolution of the conflict between the black culture and the white culture is often based on the sacrifice of the former. Ryan goes on to argue that although double-consciousness is initially a negative experience characterized by an unreconciled and self-alienating “two-ness of being” in which externally derived distorted perceptions of the African identity are dominant, it can be “cleansed” / transformed into a positive potential—double vision. . . . The person “gifted” with this double-vision achieves an understanding that is greater than the sum of the constituent realities (605). Here Ryan points out the disunity in the double-consciousness while at the same time perceiving the possibility of transforming it into a gifted diversified vision.

Denise Heinze holds the similar view that even though double-consciousness perhaps can never be integrated into a single vision, by orchestrating a sense of connectedness between cultures rather than attempting to dissolve the differences, African Americans can turn this double vision into something beneficial. Morrison herself is such an example who draws from both her African and European heritage and who benefits from a hybrid cultural background. She seems not to utterly oppose double-consciousness when she declares that “finding or imposing Western influences in/on Afro-American liter-



ature has value.” What she disagrees with is the hegemony hiding in the double-consciousness as she continues to say “but when its sole purpose is to place value only where that influence is located it is pernicious” (“Unspeakable Things Unspoken” 10). Morrison’s words reveal that the problem with African Americans is not that they have two kinds of consciousness but that white racism forces them to hate their African consciousness. Rather than the difference between black culture and white culture, it is the cultural hegemony, the systematic negation of one culture by another, the suppression by the supremacist white culture of the subaltern black culture that threatens the natural development of African Americans and nurtures their hatred towards their own culture which is counted as worthless by the defining society. What can be perceived from Morrison’s fiction is that African Americans can never part with their double-consciousness, yet self-hatred is an unhealthy state of mind, which needs to be eradicated if African Americans want to lead a healthy life, since it will lead to their alienation from their own people and own culture, strengthening their sense of dislocation and depriving them of their authenticity. It is a psychological scar left by racial discrimination on black personality. In this aspect, the exploration of the self-hatred theme in Morrison’s fiction has a different significance from the investigation of the double-consciousness in that it discusses a more urgent problem to African Americans. Morrison’s novels demonstrate that only after African Americans get rid of their self-hatred can they truly benefit from their double-consciousness, otherwise, they will forever live in a torturing dilemma.

As to the shame felt by African Americans, it still differs from self-hatred. African Americans’ feeling of shame may come from their lack of confidence under the pressure of white racism, but it can also arise from their dissatisfaction with their own action of trying to cater to racist society. The former is destructive and degrades their African tradition while the latter is constructive in its adherence to African values. What’s more, although some books and articles have dealt with the intra-racial biases in Morrison’s fiction, they fail to take in its complexity and comprehensiveness. Self-hatred not only lies