

## Toni Morrison and Her Art of Storytelling in Jazz

**SAFIA PERVEEN**

MS Scholar, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus.  
Email: [safiaaslam375@gmail.com](mailto:safiaaslam375@gmail.com)

**MUNEEBA SHAKIL**

Assistant Professor, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus.

---

### *Abstract*

*The present research study has been conducted on "Toni Morrison and Her Art of Storytelling in Jazz". This study aims to look at Morrison's art of storytelling focusing specially on her novel Jazz. Jazz offers the best specimen text through which Morrison's text can be analyzed. In Jazz, Morrison deploys a very elusive and mystical narrator, who is highly self-conscious. The present study contends that the narrator of Jazz is iconoclastic. S/he is not the traditional narrator, third person omniscient narrator. Different critics have different opinions about the narrator in Jazz. Some critics think that it is the voice of thunder the epigraph of the novel Jazz refers to or begins with: "I am the sound of thunder, Seth, I know that woman." The epigraph is prophetic. It announces not only the theme but also the role of the narrator. What is new about this research is the idea that the narrator is more than the voice of the thunder as she embodies so many things and enacts so many roles. Textual analysis has been used as a research method to interpret and analyze the text with the help of extra-textual knowledge such as historical and cross references, storytelling and narrator perspectives, and secondary resources. This study demonstrates the fluid, mercurial and protean nature of the narrator whose voice or narration cannot be reduced to a single formulaic definition.*

**Keywords:** *Storytelling, Narrative Voice, Mystical Author, Textual Analysis, Modernist Paradigm.*

---

### **Introduction**

There are several views on what constitutes storytelling and the construction of meaning in stories. Roland Barthes's essay (1994) claimed that the author alone is not accountable for a story as meaning is constructed by the reader from the author's word; the reader brings her understanding to a text. However, with a mediator, shaman or storyteller, between the author and the reader the mastery of the story code-how the author contrives the various aspects of her storytelling- may perhaps be appreciated but never the author's intellect. (p.142) According to Bordwell, storytelling means a "sequence of events in cause-effect relationships occurring in time and space" (p.5). We know each story has its own set of tropes and conventions which have been developed from their specific cultural meanings. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) developed the idea of dialectical relationship between author and reader in his essay *Discourse in the Novel*. He also suggested the existence of external voices within utterances, when characters repeat words which are not their own, but influence their thinking. Morrison broaches her art of storytelling in an innovative style; her descriptions in *Jazz* conjure up colours, taste, and smell as well as rhythm creating a multi-sensory effect in the mind of the reader. Umberto Eco also sheds light on the interpretation of the reader explicitly in his work; every person sees things according to the lens he/she uses. Every person's 'understanding of text is different. They have their own individual and particular perspective towards the understanding of any text (p. 12). According to Herrington, Ron Oliver and Thomas (2003) *willing suspension of disbelief*, means a writer can impart human interest and a semblance of truth into a fantastic tale and the reader is willing to suspend judgment concerning the implausibility of the narrative. Similarly, Morrison has an arsenal of strategies, including metaphor, in her art of narration to bring her stories to life.

The aim of this study is to elaborate Toni Morrison's art of storytelling in *Jazz*. The novel begins with the opening scene of *Jazz*, "Seth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue" (p. 3). This is pivotal to the understating of the novel. It sets up reader's expectations and creates an enigma, amassing many questions in the mind of the reader on the first page such as 'who is speaking, who is Seth, and how can you live with a flock of birds?' and 'where is Lenox Avenue? In this segment, the reader can find hints about the events in the novel. The reader's curiosity is aroused and s/he wants to get more details. The reader may regard the novel as a murder mystery from the first section. She used to live could mean she is now dead. The opening scene of the novel creates interest in the mind of the reader to discover why the characters behave as they do. *Jazz* is set in the early twentieth century during the African American Renaissance that took place in Harlem. Harlem is a neighborhood of New York where many African Americans live. Welty (1992) defines place that place is a name or identity in concrete and/or fiction. It is a gathering spot and experience for the progression of the story (p.122). According to Linden Peach (2011) analysis *Jazz* moves backwards in time. The memories of the narrator help the reader to understand, from the experiences of mixed-race child, the post- Civil War American South. It also throws light on the post-Reconstruction black migration to the North. (P. 235). In *Jazz*, the child of mixed-race means the character Golden Gray. The "Armistice was seven years old" (p. 9) refers to the end of the First World War. It also explains the 'armistice' seen as the model for formal acts of remembrance. Next, the narrator tells about the broken rules; Violet's action at the funeral is clearly not normal in term of remembrance. The reader looks at how Violet and Joe treat Dorcas' picture. Photographs of the dead are often an important part of preserving their memory. The text of *Jazz* tells the death and remembrance of the characters. The narrator indicates remembering death is important in the novel. The narrator pays particular attention to different memories of the dead that remember the dead and focus on Dorcas and the different ways in which she is remembered in the life of Violet and Joe. Morrison employs a very playful narrator who changes the reader's expectations as Jennifer Andrews (1999) points out that the narrative voice is very playful in *Jazz* because Morrison uses different narrative voices to express different aspects of the story which influence reader's attitude to the characters in the story. In *Jazz*, the narrator is very powerful and can jump from present to past and past to future. It can read the character's thoughts and can predict their future as well. For instance, "Violet invited her in to examine the record and that's how that scandalizing threesome on Lenox Avenue began. What turned out different "was who shot whom"(p.19). In these lines, the narrator hints at the future. Although, the reader is unaware of who is going to be murdered, the narrator warns about it beforehand. It seems quite mysterious and a prediction of the future. The plot of *Jazz* is non-linear and non-chronological. The twentieth century's popular mode of writing, the stream of consciousness, puts an end to chronological and linear order as the norms of storytelling. The narration keeps switching and fluctuating between the viewpoints of the characters, inanimate objects and even concepts. The main objective of this study is to prove *Jazz* is not written in traditional writing but it is in modern writing. This study also meets all the standard of twentieth century. Morrison uses a narrator who is mysterious and without gender identity. Its means when readers reader *Jazz*, they can't judge the identity of the reader. The readers cannot identify who is speaking because the narrator keeps reader in illusion and do not have a clear narrative voice. Louisa Joyner corroborated Violet's mental state when she attempted to abduct a baby. She felt peace when she took the baby in her arms. She felt the blood circulating in her veins and comfort even in her stomach (p.19). This shows the idea of wanting a baby, even though, she said that she didn't and was too old then to have the one. It also shows a mother's love for her child and she forget the entire world when she takes a baby in her arms. "Her private cracks, however, were known to him I call them cracks because that is what they are" (p.22). It explores and ensures that the reader regards Violet as an unreliable source of information due to her changes in mind/personality. While reading the story of *Jazz*, the reader is under an illusion because the storyteller, the figure of authority, promises one thing but does the opposite. This reveals the duplicitously and playful nature of the narrator. In *Jazz*, the traditional narrator has become depersonalized; its subjectivity gone, and readers cannot uncover the narrator's personality.

On the first page of the novel, the narrator explains the background of the story, teasing and tantalizing the reader's anticipation. The narrator says 'I know this woman (Violet). She lived with her husband (Joe) and her beautiful birds in Lenox Avenue. The narrator also claims to know her husband (Joe) and that he fell in love with an eighteen-year-old girl whose name is Dorcas and she lived with her aunt. But when she

deceives to Joe with her friend of similar age, Joe feels jealous and shoots Dorcas in a club when she is dancing with her friend, Acton. After that the narrator tells that Violet went to Dorcas's funeral and slashed her face with a knife. Violet shows her feelings by doing this horrific action. Next Violet runs back home through the snow and she free her birds from their cage even though her birds, said to her, "I love you". (p.16) Morrison uses the ideas of whispering at the start of the novel. She projects the entire plot or story on the first page. The narrator foretells the story, but although s/she appears to know what has happened, the narrator can lead the reader to make assumptions that are not correct. There appears to be more than one narrator. This is only one example of the author's art of storytelling. She uses similar strategies in her other novelssuch as *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. The analysis of *Jazz* follows keeping in view the theories of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida.

## Literature Review

There are many critiques of the post-modern art of storytelling. Referring to Roland Barthes's essay (1994), *The Death of the Author*, William Gass claims Barthes' essay signified a decline in authorial power in the text. In *Jazz*, Morrison deploys a very elusive and mysterious narrative voice. This voice gives the reader the illusion that the narrator is, perhaps, the traditional figure of authority. In *Jazz*, the narrator is first person omniscient and knows the thoughts and feelings of all of the characters in the story. In Morrison's conversation with Naylor (1985), Morrison states that *Jazz* itself is a novel recreated from the remains of recollection, chitchat, and gossip. Morrison's work of art is the "Reclamation of identity and of the past" (p.576). In her interview with Jane Bakerman (1978), Morrison states that, "I cannot really get into it. But I do know that whatever the reader has in his experience or his imagination" (p.56-60). Morrison's aim is to provide narratives that will help readers to organize their knowledge, and to do it in a beautiful way. She is very conscious of her style and she is open to experimentation. In the following interview with Brown Cecil (1995), Brown puts Morrison the following question. Brown Cecil: "Have you encouraged their readers in reading your writing? TM: That is right. I first structure them on, not on fairy tales, which usually have happy endings, positive and everything is back replaced correctly. I create a curiosity in the minds of the readers because they can read it with care (p. 455-473)." In this interview, she admits that all the characters exist in her mind with the knowledge of what is happening. She knows all the characters and places of the story already in her mind. Therefore, the narrator of *Jazz* can start the story in a mysterious way. In her interview with Nellie McKay (1983), Morrison claims "I do not want to offer my readers a bit to swallow. I want to give them something new to feel and think about it. I also hope that I adopt and make it up in a way that is legitimate and make a valuable thing" (p. 413-429). In her interview with Nellie McKay (1983), she said that she wants to engage the reader's imagination. She gains the reader's attention by giving hints, clues to engage the reader's imagination. According to Jerome, the distinction between the modern novel and the classical myth or folktale is the element of consciousness. Modern literature is the expression of modern science that becomes more epistemological and less ontological (p. 691-710). In *Jazz*, Morrison projects a first person anonymous, androgynous or omniscient narrator. It is not a straightforward storyteller of a sequence of events; however, it has a mysterious individuality that needs to understand itself in relationship to the characters in society (p.11). Morrison (1987) claims to be very different from the black writers of the past. She considers that her work is different from those women who experienced black slavery in their time. (p. 110) Morrison shares her views on the lived reality of the black community and is mostly concerned about those people.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my study is grounded in the theories of Roland Barthes' (1977) famous essay, *The Death of the Author* because the narrator takes over as Morrison demonstrates in *Jazz*. Morrison's narrator is at par with Barthes' dictum; the death of the author signifies a decline in authority. Roland Barthes (1977) discusses narrative meaning in his writing. He talks about textual meaning whereby the reader takes charge and creates meaning from the text which is indefinable and personal to her. According to the Barthes (1977), the author is a scripter. Authors arrange text using their vast knowledge, but it is the

responsibility of the reader to create meaning according to his/her knowledge. Therefore, a text is created by various writings, which developed from many cultures and communal relations of the dialogue. It also includes satire, contestation. So the readers relate all these things to their own culture and values. (p. 4) Neil McCaw (2013), in *How to Read Texts*, encourages readers to reject the idea that the author is significant in producing textual meaning. He explains that the birth of the reader should be at the outlay of the death of the author. Barthes displaced the orthodoxy approach with the idea that writing gives control to readers to find meaning and so the author comes to his own death (p.67-68). (This really refers to role reversal, the active role of the reader in interpreting meaning and the passive role of the writer in allowing the reader to seize the impetus; whereas in the past, readers were seen as the passive recipients- empty cups- of the author's knowledge or wisdom.) Barthes argues that writing itself has a life of its own, that it 'performs' the formation of meaning in its own right removed from authorial purpose. (p. 68) M.A.R. Habib (2008) defines in *Modern Literary Criticism and theory of Derrida's deconstruction*, the close reading of a text's language, its use of presuppositions and transcendental signifiers (p.106)

A major notion associated with post-structuralism is that of 'Deconstruction', a term attributed to Jacques Derrida who provided a new way to examine texts in *Speech and Phenomena*(1973), *Of Grammatology* (1976) and *Writing and Difference*(1978), and in one of his lectures *Structure, sign and play in Human Sciences*. Deconstruction refers to the detailed and rigorous interpretation of text to grasp its covert meanings and intrinsic contradictions, even neglected aspects that lie within it. Derrida's deconstruction views regard Western philosophy as futile and that traditional core concepts should be subverted to allow more 'free play' in interpreting text. By 'free play', he means to live in a 'decentered' world where there are no fixed meanings for signs and every individual is allowed to construct his/ her own meaning from the text devoid of the personality of the author. By reconstructing the text in such a way, it becomes 'plural' marked by several possible meanings. Derrida's concept of "deconstruction" (2008) is relevant to the study (p.73). Deconstruction suggests decomposing a text into smaller parts in order to extract meaning. The reader reads in between the lines to find out the hidden truth. Similarly, the reader of *Jazz* can also deconstruct and find out in what way the narrator of *Jazz* does not play the typical role of a narrator. The more the reader reads the story, the more it becomes clear that the narrator does not follow the traditional pattern. Derrida claims deconstruction has no fixed definition or systematization because the significance of the terms it utilizes is always shifting and fluid, according to the contexts and texts used (p.100).

Barthes's *Death of the Author* (1967) maintains that the meaning of the text is not drawn from the author but from the reader, who has the freedom to generate his/her own meanings and understanding in multiple ways. Deconstructing a text unmasks the discontinuities, disunity, and gaps by actively engaging in an endless free play of interpreting the text. Derrida's meaning making process relies on the concept of *Differance* which means "differ" and "defer" and maintains that every word derives its meaning from what it is not. The word 'house' differs from 'shed', 'mansion', 'hotel' and possess a certain traditional image; so, there are differences between the words as well as what they signify. He asserts that meanings are always in state of being 'deferred' and therefore there are no single or absolute meanings and a word can never mean one thing. A single statement derives its meaning from its relationship with surrounding language through difference from all other possible meanings that are multiple in numbers. Furthermore, he claims that the interpretation of meaning is an endless game because there is no meaning or referent that cannot be reinterpreted in turn to mean something else. This fact calls attention to Derrida's famous quotation that "there is nothing outside the text." Language is a self-reflexive, self-contained relationship between numerous signifiers and a sign is defined by the inherent difference it has in relation to other signs.

Derrida's deconstruction also argues against the concept of binary opposition proposed by Structuralists that claims the world and reality are arranged in binary oppositions so each concept is associated with another. Terms such as man/woman, good/evil, white/black, where one term defines the presence and second is considered as absence known as the "Western philosophy of presence". Richard Rorty (1978) contends Derrida's concept, "There is nothing outside of the text" (p.141-160). It means that the reader can gain all the information s/he needs through it. The reader of *Jazz* mostly relies on the text to find out about the social and cultural conventions of black people but relies on the narrator for an explanation in

explaining. However, Morrison dislikes the passive reading of text. She wants the reader to be actively engaged in deconstructing the meaning of the text which is discussed in the next section.

## Reader Response Theory

The reader response theory discusses the role of the reader in this study. In *Jazz*, all the authorial power is in the hands of the reader as s/he can exclude meaning from the text according to their own understating. Reader response theory focuses on the role of the reader in the creation of textual meaning. It means that the text has no single, fixed meanings and reading is not about the detection of the truth from the text. Readers are free from the restrictions of thinking that they must read in particular ways; they can read the text in their own way to discover meaning and familiarity at a variety of levels. The readers create their own meanings and their own texts throughout their reading. This brings us back to Roland Barthes' (1967) notion of the different types of engagement readers have with texts. (p.71)Ivor Armstrong Richards (1942) in *How to Read a Page* argued, the reason for focusing on the text itself, rather than any of its contents, was because readers should not concern themselves with 'what is going on in the author's mind when he penned the sentence' but 'what the words, given the rest of the language, may mean' (p.15).

## Research Questions

- Why does Morrison employ a narrator who is anti- traditional to challenge the role of the traditional narrator as the figure of authority?
- How does the narrator challenge the authority of the third person omniscient narrator?
- Why does Morrison employ a very playful narrator who changes the reader's expectations?
- How is the narrator representative of the modernist paradigm of writing?

Focusing on *Jazz* will help the research broaden the scope of the study because *Jazz* is both a Modernist and a Post-Modernist text. Modernist techniques employ stream of consciousness techniques. There is the idea of the fragmentation of the mind and subjectivity defined in psychological terms as split personality. The researcher will point out these elements in the text of *Jazz*. It gives the researcher a lot of scope to deconstruct and analyze Morrison and her art of storytelling.

## Analyses of the Study

### Style of Narrative and Role of the Narrator

Morrison executes the narration of the story through an interactive conversation between an assortment of voices and perspectives. That is how she persuades her readers to study her story through the interrelationships between or dialogization of various perspectives. Therefore, she uses a variety of narrative voices in her novel *Jazz*. According to Rachel Lister (2009), the interaction involving multiple voices, discourses and themes makes the whole endeavor of reading her narratives "improvisational" (p. 14).

In her interview with McKay (1983), Morrison commented that she grew up in an environment where stories were told and elements such as black traditions, music, and language were prominent at that time (p.414-15)OumarNdongo (2007) says that Morrison's writings connect a wide assortment of readers and convincing themes about love, equality, social survival, and tribal and sexual politics- to name a few. In fact, using such 'universals' she reworks history and re-assesses cultures. (P.25-31).As the story begins, the narrator creates the mystery of a love triangle of Violet, Joe, and Dorcas. It transpires that Violet and Joe is an unhappily married couple as they have no children even after several years of marriage. The narrator describes how Joe falls in love with young Dorcas. She is only eighteen years old; narrator comments that Joe falls in love with an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deep down, spooky loves" (p.16). According to Henry Louis Gates (1988), the first person narrator appears to be the focus of narration. In his

assessment, *Jazz* is a 'Speaker text', a text whose symbolic strategy suggests an oral literary traditional, and which produces the illusion of oral narration (p. 181). On the first page of the novel, Morrison uses a first person narrator who shapes shifts position to become an omniscient narrator. But throughout the entire story, the narrator remains ambiguous. The narrator informs the reader about the death of Dorcas as how one evening Joe follows her and finds her dancing with a young man named Acton. Joe goes back and immediately comes back with a gun and shoots her. The observers are shocked by his act. Dorcas refuses medical help. Unfortunately, Dorcas bleeds to death. People knew that Joe was having an affair with Dorcas and he shot her and she died. Here the narrator provides information about Dorcas early life (before her death), how Dorcas lived in a middle-class family with her aunt after the death of her parents. Alice Manfred, Dorcas' aunt goes into deep mourning after the murder. Although she knows who killed her niece, she has no money for legal matters. So she curses Joe. Morrison says in her interviews that she taps into about the reader's imagination, even though she projects the whole plot on the first page. With the help of the omniscient narrator, we get to know the characters. For instance, the narrator describes Violet as good looking enough to be attractive. "She is awfully skinny, Violet; fifty, but still good looking" (p.2). But the narrator wonders, like Violet, why Joe was attracted to Dorcas. The narrator reveals what was going on in the mind of Violet when she came to know that her husband was in love with a young girl. She constructs a plan to make her husband jealous and to get his attention. The reader knows she makes a plan and then acts upon it. Violet is a good looking woman and thinks she can push Joe by getting a boyfriend to visit her house (p.2). Paula Gallant Eckard (1993) agrees that *Jazz* has a strange narrator (p.11) on the first page of the novel, the murder of a young girl proves to be true, but later, at the end of that section, the narrator predicts another murder which doesn't take place at all. Richard Hardack (1995) claims that the "narrator...is not just the book...but the sweet sharp tooth of double-consciousness itself" (p.164-5). Henry Louis Gates (1988) referring to *Jazz*, says of the narrator: "Indeterminate: the narrative voice cannot be determined by readers. It is not male or female, young or old, rich or poor voice. According to Tracey (2000) in *Jazz*, the narrator problematizes the narrator's lack of gender. That is why the reader of *Jazz* cannot discern whether the voice of narrator is a male or a female. Woolf (1945), in her book "A Room of One's Own", writes about the concept of androgyny. Artist Morrison also adopts this idea in her novel *Jazz*. In *Jazz*, the voice of the narrator cannot be identified when the narrator talks about what Alice thinks about both Joe and Violet. Alice talks at length about her fears both for herself and for the community at large. For example, with the end of the March, Alice puts her anguish to the one side to think again of what she identifies as the impunity of the guy who destroyed her niece just as he could (p.73).

The narrator explores the grief of both Violet and Alice Manfred. The reader can feel the trauma and grief they feel such as when Alice tells to Violet that she cannot imagine her measure my pain and loss and 'nobody can feel my trauma' (p.87). However, the grief they feel brings these two women together. The death of Dorcas forms a link between them. Morrison, as she said in an interview, claims that all the characters exist in her mind with the knowledge of what happens. Before she begins to write, she knows all the characters and places of the story in her mind, which is how the narrator of the *Jazz* can begin the narration as a mystery.

### **Meta- narrative in *Jazz***

"Meta" is a Greek word which means beyond, transcending, and more comprehensive. "Narrative" is a story; characterized by the telling of a story. A meta-narrative is the comprehensive idea behind the story which is common to all. It is a narrative about all the narratives of history. Meta means the outside forces and our choices that lead us in shaping and preparing us for what comes next. According to Collins English Dictionary (2017) Metanarrative "Any story told to justify another story, involving artifice; a story oneself that provides a view of one's experiences". The Greek word "Meta" refers to a comprehensive idea that is beyond, behind, and transcendent; "narrative" is a story that is characterized by its mode of telling. According to Lyotard (1984), there are special types of narratives that have a social function. Richardson (2017) defines meta- narrative as the prefix "meta" deriving from the Greek which meaning "with", "after", and "between." In the first half of the seventh century, "meta" took on the additional meaning of "beyond." (p.1). It shows that in *Jazz*, the narrator tells a story after a story but the readers can see all the

characters of the story attached with each other. That is why, it gives a complete thought about characters although the meanings are hidden in the text and it also link with the Derrida's concept "there is nothing outside of the text". The lives of characters are permeating with and influenced by the torment of their forefathers and their past lives. For Morrison, the past is infinite and it exists as a continuum. *Jazz* is infused by an independent stylistic device which talks about inside and outside of the story's perimeter. It shows the structure of the text while being ostentatiously self-referential also. Therefore, *Jazz* builds up its own mystery that tantalizes and affects the minds of the readers. Morrison gives *Jazz* a detailed historical setting notorious for the difficulty of its polyethnic traditions. Polyethnic means inhabited by or consisting of people from many ethnic backgrounds. The story of *Jazz* is reconstructed by bits and pieces of the different memories of the characters. The plot of the story is constructed from different memories of different characters such as Joe and Violet. Morrison informs us in *Jazz* that perspectives are related to borders. She also explains the divisions between South and North. Weinstein Philip (2002) asserts that there are multiple narrators and different time sequences with nonlinear storytelling. According to Morrison and Faulkner, the limit of narrative fiction is its means of communication and representation. Their art of writing and ways of expressing ideas are similar. Faulkner refers to different narrative styles that are embodied by various narrators that express time and relations and also explore consciousness. The narration of *Jazz* has a story-within-story meta-narrative about characters' past lives and how their past lives intersect with each other. Louisa Joyner in Toni Morrison the essential guide, while referring to *Jazz*, claims that Violet clearly experiences mental illness and a psychological break down as do Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) as literary precedents. Regarding the narrative and linguistic techniques these writers employ to suggest mental illness. Morrison employs an internal distinction through the phrase 'that Violet (p.90). Jean Wyatt (2017) says, "at the level of the body, she remains connected to her mother. She thinks repeatedly and obsessively about how cramped her mother's body must be in the "narrow well" where she threw herself to die, it was a place so narrow, so dark" (p. 49).

The narrator describes the psychological condition of Violet after her mother's death. She could neither continue anywhere nor could go away. "The well sucked her sleep, but the idea of departure terrified her" (p.100). Morrison links *Jazz*'s plot with the Western plot that starts with death but ends with love. As Jean Wyatt says, "Noting that her characters are slipping out from under the narrative line she has imposed on them, the narrator identifies what she has left out" (p.64). The narrator of *Jazz* makes this point clear by saying something is wrong or might be missing there. "Something dreadful something else you have to shape in prior to you can form it out" (p.228). The narrator tells us the central point of the historical interlude is that Golden Gray, on the way to his father's house, expresses his loss of a father. The narrator reveals how he misses his father's love and expresses his feelings. "He was crying....only now, he thought... prior to, I attention everyone was one equipped, like me" (p.158). The quest to find his father figure, which is the missing element in his life, connects Golden Gray with the rest of the characters who are looking for their mother figures or substitutes and with the rest of the story. Jean Wyatt (2017) argues Morrison enhances the concrete presence of loss through Golden Gray's lament: "this part of me that does not know me has never touched me" (p. 60). Thus Jean Wyatt claims Morrison shares with Freud "a faith in the potential healing that comes from opening up and processing traumatic memories of the past" (p. 61). Wyatt explores in Love and narrative form in Toni Morrison's later novels, "the separation from the parent creates a wound that never heals in the child" (p.61) In Morrison's interview with Carabi (1995), Morrison says, 'Wild is naked and pregnant like Beloved at the end of the *Beloved*.' Morrison is quite explicit, "Wild is like Beloved. The history and their past were the same. The lady they described Wild "...could be Sethe's descendant, Beloved.... Who runs away, finishes up in Virginia, which is next to Ohio" (p. 96). However, the narrator claim that 'Wild was still out there and real'. Someone saw the man they called Hunters Hunter, jumped, grabbed his shoulder and, when he turned around to gaze at the cane field, murmurs loud enough for somebody to hear, "Wild. Dog me, if it ain't Wild." (P.152). In this Meta-narrative, the narrator is not only talking about their past, present, families, history, and their slavery, but also talking about their love between Joe and Violet. Joe and Violet meets Joe in Virginia where "she had been working in the fields" (p.38). They decide to get married when they meet at night. The narrator tells us about Joe's reaction when he first time sees his mother, Wild. In Morrison's interview with Dana Micucci (1994), she referred to a

key theme in her writings that in almost all her narrations, the theme of love and search for identity is present. (p. 278). As the narrator declares, “I know Joe,” it describes only what she divines from Joe’s action on the street (p.119). Joe’s character is more complex encompasses difficult feelings. The narrator realizes that her vision was narrowly focused on external elements and saw nothing at all of the “heart-pockets closed to me”(p.200) nothing at all of their intimate feelings.

Andrea O’ Reilly (1999) argues that Wild represents a primal, pre-modern, primitive state. (p. 273). Elizabeth AnnBeaulieu (2003) points out in *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia* that Joe and Violet migrate from Virginia where they were laborers and come to New York City. Joe’s story is his way of explaining why he shot Dorcas. He had no intention to kill her but responded instinctually to a sequence of losses in hunting for this mother, his father and figuratively, for his wife Violet, when she starts to sleep with her doll (p.171). According to Jean Wyatt (2017), *Jazz* plays with several kinds of love and, at the end of the novel, the narrator invites the reader to create their own story. Narration in *Jazz* mirrors and shows the love between characters while the narrative structure is open-ended so the readers can conclude according to their own perspective. The narrative begins with a model of love as a traumatic loss. The experience of losing their mothers pulls both Violet and Joe ever backwards, towards reenacting their tragic losses (p.45).

### **Medium of touch in Jazz**

According to Jaleel Akhtar (2014), Morrison expresses ownership of the self, possession, and authorship through her fictions. To own someone in terms of exercising absolute rights over their bodies is like having dominion over them. The desire to make a violent gesture is synonymous with the desire to seize and appropriate. Touch, which confers ownership, reassurance and possession, should not come about by force or violence. Touch which respects another’s entity is restorative (p. 90). Irigaray Luce (1996) suggests in *I Love to You* that the purpose behind a request is to make the reader think about communication, be conscious of the switch in giving form to words and meaning. It also shows the place between two bodies (p. 125) at the moment of their awakening when they address each other, a process of communication in which both participate (P. 126). In *Jazz*, Joe’s touch is forceful. It conveys the desire to possess and be possessed. As Irigaray (2002) points out, to possess is a transitive verb which means ownership and “the risk of reducing the other to an object” (p. 125). Morrison states that to touch and be touched is an imperative process in her fiction. For human beings to survive and prosper, they also need auto-affection and self-experience. Claire Colebrook (2009) defines auto-affection as a gesture and movement towards touching the other (p. 35). The understanding of self-touching and auto-affection is an act of self-recognition that requires placing oneself in relation to the other. McQuillan (2008) makes a distinction between touching someone else and touching one’s self. Self-touching generally includes the hint of the truant other who makes the demonstration of self-touching significant as an ordeal of touch, the experience of nearness and contact at its limits (p. 208). Jaleel Akhtar (2014) claims the final section of *Jazz* is about the healing power of touch. The androgynous narrative voice which personifies the book talks about the pain of others’ lives which it shares with the readers. The narrative voice finds itself mediating something profoundly wounded in their relationships with each other and their lives and finds itself touching the characters and being touched by them in return (P. 91).

According to Irizarry’s (1996) aesthetics of reading, the book startles the reader into paying attention; “including carnal attentiveness” (p. 124). It invites the reader to interrelate freely and connect with dialogue. Drew Leder (1990) briefly points out the defining moment of touch as when the subject says “I think I was? Establish in my body with a lover’s touch” (p. 97).

Harold Bloom (2005) claims Morrison’s novels confirm the desire to hold up for scrutiny the disgrace and trauma which exist in the lives of the black people (p. 134). As Irigaray Luce (2000) points out, “the other can touch us, mainly through words” (p. 18). Michelle claims that Morrison’s novel reveals that both men and women have a similar potential and motivation to experience love, but differences in gender, culture, and socialization make this capacity more complicated. In *Jazz*, Morrison describes how her characters as that African Americans are were slaves living in a racial society which denied their status as human beings.

The bond of love is frequently combined shame repression though control and the dislocation of self (p. 2). Jaleel Akhtar (2014) suggests that “touch confirms the closeness of presence even in the thankful look; touch makes us conscious of our physical survival, our personification inside the style of reception and explanation” (p. 94).

## Conclusion

The novel begins with Dorcas’ death. Dorcas is a unifying force in the novel which can be seen from the structure. Gradually, it moves back to the past, to Violet and Joe’s childhood. In the end the characters are busy renewing their love somehow misleading as the narrator she has missed ‘something rogue’. After reading the text of *Jazz*, it is revealed that Morrison has continually improvised the narration. The narrator’s voice shifts from first person to third person and first person partial omniscient. The narrator does not participate and evolve with time but demands the readers create a (jazz) riff on the themes of the novel through call- and – response. The narrator tells and retells the story in such an artistic way that there is the making and remaking and innovation of the themes and characters or even on the narrator and reader. The narrator conflates personalities not only in the mind of the readers but also in the mind of the characters. This is because Morrison uses her as the unifying force in the narrative.

First, she causes the big change in Violet’s peaceful but emotionally sterile life. At the tail end of the story, their commitment to each other eventually reunites the couple who had been drifting away from each other. The narrator conflates the personalities not only in the minds of the readers but also in the minds of the characters. As a reader, at various points in the analysis, the importance of the narrative voice can be seen. The narrator of the *Jazz* is the book itself. Here, the reader discovers the identity of the narrator. The narrator is representative of the modernist paradigm of writing in *Jazz*. It shows that Morrison uses the narrator who gives modern technique with the progression of the novel. The narrator of *Jazz* is not a traditional narrator and the plot of the story is non-linear. In *Jazz*, the traditional narrator has become depersonalized, its subjectivity has ceased, and readers cannot see the narrator’s personality. Morrison creates a strong relationship of the reader with her writing. Therefore, she creates a narrator who is omniscient but knows everything about the novel. Through this narrator, she creates a curiosity in the mind of the readers.

The novel starts with the mysterious question that proves her competence in the writing. The narrator is anti-traditional in challenging the traditional role of the narrator as a figure of authority. The narration does not follow chronological order. Morrison uses modernist techniques. So in *Jazz*, we can see all the authorial power is in the hands of the reader and the role of the author is terminated. Morrison uses a playful narrator who is not properly guiding the readers about what to expect. The narrator challenges the authority of the third person omniscient narrator. The readers can choose to obtain meaning from the text according to their own understanding, thinking, viewpoints, and judgment. Morrison’s art of storytelling wants to engage the reader’s expectations. The present research proved in this study that the narrator of *Jazz* is not the traditional narrator but a post- modern narrator that meets all the standards of a good writing.

This study concludes that in *Jazz*, Morrison exploits a very vague and mysterious narrator who is highly self-conscious and creates a mystery in the mind of the reader. It is argued that the narrator of *Jazz* is iconoclastic, not a traditional third person omniscient narrator because s/he not only talks about present but tells the readers about the future of the characters in the *Jazz*. In *Jazz*, the narrator is highly self-conscious and there is no chronological order of events. The plot of the story is non- linear. While in the Post-Modernist text, there is the recreation of historical literacy. Although the scope of Post-Modernism is very vast and there is no single definition of Post-Modernism, yet the text of *Jazz* meets all the standard of post-modern text. It also creates a curiosity in the mind of the reader. At the end of the novel, it is found that the narrator of the *Jazz* is the book itself.

## References

- Akhtar, J. (2014). *Dismemberment in the fiction of Toni Morrison*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Andrews, J. (1999). Reading Toni Morrison's Jazz: Rewriting the Tall Tale and Playing with the Trickster in the White American and African-American Humour Traditions. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 29(1), 87-108.
- Angels, C. (1995) Interview with Toni Morrison. *Belles Lettres* , 43.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2010). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (Vol. 1). University of Texas Press.
- Barthes, R. (1994). 11 The Death of the Author. *Media Texts, Authors and Readers: A Reader*, 166.
- Bakerman, J. (1978, July). The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison. In *Black American Literature Forum* (pp. 56-60).
- Beaulieu, E. A. (Ed.). (2003). *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Bloom, H. (2005). Bloom's Modern Critical Views Toni Morrison (p. 232).
- Brown, Cecil, & Morrison, T. (1995) Interview with Toni Morrison. *The Massachusetts Review*, 455-473.
- Barthes, R. (1977). The Death of the Author in Image, Music, Text. trad. *Stepehn Heath*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Carabi, A. (1995) Toni Morrison (Interview). *Belles Lettres. A Review of Books by Women*,
- Erickson, P. (1993). Canon Revision Update: A 1992 Edition. [en.oxforddictionaries.com](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com).
- Gates, Jr & Henry L. *Rev. of Jazz*. Gates and Appiah 52-55
- Herrington, J., Oliver, R., & Reeves, T. C. (2003). Patterns of engagement in authentic online learning environments. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 19(1).
- Habib, M. A. R. (2008). *A history of literary criticism and theory: from Plato to the present*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Herrington, J., Oliver, R., & Reeves, T. C. (2003). Patterns of engagement in authentic online learning environments. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 19(1).
- Irigaray, L. (2). *Way of Love*. A&C Black.
- Irigaray, L. (1996). *I Love to You*. A&C Black.
- Jones, C. M. (1997). Traces and Cracks: Identity and Narrative in Toni Morrison's Jazz. *African American Review*, 31(3), 481-495.
- Lister, R. (2009). *Reading Toni Morrison*. ABC-CLIO.
- Lytotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (Vol. 10). U of Minnesota Press.
- Lytotard, Jean F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Geoff Bennigton and Brian Massumi trans, 37.
- Leder, D. (1990) *The Absent Body*. University of Chicago Press.
- Morrison, T. (1985). Interview with Gloria Naylor. A Conversation. *Southern Review*, 21(3), 567-593.
- McCaw, N. (2013). *How to read texts: A student guide to critical approaches and skills*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Morrison, T., & Zinsser, W. (1987). Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir. R. & Baker, *Inventing the truth: The art and craft of memoir*. Boston, USA: Houghton Mifflin, 101-24.
- Morrison, T. (1994). Nobel lecture. *Les Prix Nobel*, 197.
- Mitchell, A. (1998). HISTORY, GENDER, AND THE SOUTH IN MORRISON'S "JAZZ". *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 31(2), 49.
- Micucci, D. (1994). An inspired life: Toni Morrison writes and a generation listens. *Danille Taylor-Guthrie (1994), ed. Conversations with Toni Morrison, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi*.
- McQuillan, M. (2008). Toucher I:(The problem with self-touching). *Derrida Today*, 1(2), 201-211.
- Morrison, T. (2008). *Toni Morrison: Conversations*. Univ. Press of Mississippi.
- Morrison, T., & Nellie M. (1983) An Interview with Toni Morrison *Contemporary Literature*, 413-429.
- McKay, N & Morrison, T. (1983): An Interview with Toni Morrison. *Contemporary Literature*, 413-429.
- Morrison, T. (1973) *Jazz*. New York: Random House-Knopf , 1-225
- Ndongo, O. (2007). Toni Morrison and Her Early Works: In Search of Africa. *Sciences sociales et humaines*, 25-31.

- Peach, L. (2011). Toni Morrison. *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction After 1945*, 233.
- Richards, I. A. (1942). *How to read a page: a course in effective reading, with an*
- Rorty, R. (1978). Philosophy as a kind of writing: An essay on Derrida. *New Literary History*, 10(1), 141-160.
- Welty, Ward P. (1992) *Rev. of Jazz*. CLA Journal, 223-27
- Wyatt, J. (2017) Love in the novels of Toni Morrison. *Angelaki* , 64.
- Weinstein, P. M. (2002). Review Of" The Identifying Fictions Of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity And Postmodern Blackness" By JN Duvall.
- Woolf, V. (2015). *A room of one's own and three guineas*. OUP Oxford.

