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Toni Morrison's Hero
A Song of Solemn Men

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Abstract: This essay claims *Song of Solomon* is an example of a hero's journey, aligned with the narratological features of the genre. Through an analysis of comradeship as the virtue of the quest, the hero's identity within family, gender and geography becomes a function of access to ancestry. Morrison claims these elements and protagonist Milkman's quest engenders an African American claim on the hybrid American mythology.

Key Words: *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison, hero's journey, quest narrative, quest genre, family, gender, geography, African American diaspora, mythology

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Research & Method	3
2. Mythology and an African American family	4
2.1 What is an <i>idea virtuous</i> ?	6
2.2 Who is a virtuous hero?	7
3. Comradeship, People and Places	9
3.1 How comradeship is achieved	11
3.2 How comradeship collapses	13
4. A Hero's Journey	17
4.1 Assembling a Quest	18
4.2 Actions of a Hero	19
4.3 The question of a Heroine	22
5. Conclusion & Future Research	25
Bibliography	26

1. Introduction

“A good cliché can never be overwritten, it’s still mysterious.”

-Conversations with Toni Morrison, 160

The writing of *Song of Solomon* (1977) followed the death of the author’s father. ‘Daddy’ follows the book’s title page and the inscription reads:

*The fathers may soar
And the children may know their names*

These introductory lines impart the novel’s theme. In the short essay “She and Me” (2002), Morrison laments an unsatisfying first job to her father: “Perhaps he understood I wanted a solution to work, not an escape from it” (Morrison 16). Her father answered with some advice: “Listen. You don’t live there. You live here. At home, with your people. Just go to work; get your money and come on home” (Morrison 16). For the writer this lesson meant “[...]from that moment on, I never considered the level of labor to be the measure of self or placed the security of a job above the value of home” (Morrison 17). Liberated from dwelling on a burdensome task, the author names her father as a merciful teacher. Knowledge is imparted between genders and generations. This theme is present in *Song of Solomon*.

The protagonist in Morrison’s third novel, *Milkman Dead*, is a descendant of a forgotten Solomon. A legend and a cliff called Solomon’s Leap are to be discovered in a Virginia village where the ancestral slave unbelievably lifted off the ground and rode on air back to Africa. Traveling backwards through his family’s ancestry, Milkman discovers a kind of mythology surrounds the Dead family and his character is enriched on the journey from Michigan, to Ohio, to Virginia. Born and raised in Michigan, with no awareness of ancestry and only scant knowledge that he has family across town, Milkman discovers the mysterious Pilate. His aunt’s appearance and unbelievable powers have caused her to become a benign outsider. She lives apart with her daughter and granddaughter. The relationship forged between Pilate and Milkman will change the lives of these characters. Under the influence of Pilate’s property-minded brother, Milkman’s father, Milkman nearly never leaves his hometown. Finally departing from his fractured family role models, Milkman travels to Ohio, the midpoint, and uncovers the stories of grandparents that he never met. Taking this knowledge to Virginia, Milkman discovers Solomon’s defining act in the Dead family history. He realizes that powerful Pilate needs this knowledge the most and risks his life to bring it to her. This surprising nephew becomes a saving grace for the aunt who was an essential teacher. Knowledge is imparted between genders and generations.

If asked how she composes her novels, Morrison states in *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (1994) that the end is her starting point: “I always know the ending; that’s where I start. I don’t always have a beginning, so I don’t always know how to start a book. Sometimes I have to rewrite different beginnings” (Morrison 101). This reveals that Morrison writes plot points in order to make her end scene ‘true.’ In the case of *Song of Solomon*, scenes must be created which fulfill Milkman’s flight from Solomon’s Leap. The elements of this end scene include: Milkman brings Pilate to Solomon’s Leap, where she buries her earring and the contents of her green sack (Morrison 335). A mortal shot fired by Guitar Bains hits Pilate. Milkman holds his aunt as she delivers her dying words. Having witnessed his astounding transformation to manhood, Pilate’s message is a reminder that the knowledge he delivered to her was a merciful act of love: “If I’d a knowed more, I would a loved more” (Morrison 336). Rather than answering with violence Milkman cries out to his friend, his foil, Guitar to bear witness: “You want me? Huh? You want my life?” (Morrison 337). Milkman leaps into the air, assured that he “could *ride* it” (Morrison 337).

Milkman’s flight and his delivery of a restorative knowledge while under mortal threat are indicative of a hero’s journey and the culminating focus of chapter four in this analysis. Joseph Campbell’s benchmark study of heroic journeys, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) synthesizes mythologies across cultures and millennia and reveals that quest narratives exhibit predictable, known features of a genre. The author must present an idea/value that a reader recognizes as virtuous. By completing a quest, a hero is proven capable of restoring the threatened virtue. In chapter four a close reading of the text where the author summons the hero in a critical scene, is followed by a test of *Song of Solomon* against the documented stages of a quest.

In order to envision a quest, a virtue must be understood and then put into imbalance. Comradeship between genders, as a virtue in African American culture, is revealed in *Song of Solomon*. In chapter three of this analysis I will argue that Morrison includes plot points in the novel which illustrate comradeship being achieved and collapsed. Emancipation from institutional slavery displaced families amidst pervasive racism and built obstacles to ancestry. Leaving the American South for urban cities and destinations in the North became known as the African American diaspora. Claiming these elements, Morrison’s texts engender a cultural identity that is principally African American. Within a hybrid American culture, analysis of Morrison’s work would be remiss if this point of reference were overlooked. The author notes in *Paris Review*:

It's very important for me that my work be African American; if it assimilates into a different or larger pool, so much the better. But I shouldn't be *asked* to do that. Joyce is not asked to do that. Tolstoy is not. I mean, they can all be Russian, French, Irish or Catholic, they write out of where they come from, and I do too. It just so happens that that space for me is African American; it could be Catholic, it could be Midwestern. I'm those things too, and they are all important. (Morrison ques.70)

The action of the African American diaspora leaves rifts in families, like the Deads.

Milkman's discovery of the mythology of the Dead family is the focus of chapter two in this analysis. In *Song of Solomon* the diaspora becomes tangible in the arch of a hero's journey. By developing Milkman's character, impairing others by contrast, Morrison's hero tunnels through a history of gender-based family roles across generations. The narrative is assembled and delivered using the stages of a quest with an archetypical hero as the protagonist. I will argue that in *Song of Solomon*, comradeship between genders is the virtue defended and Milkman is the novel's hero. Milkman gains the ability to see how comradeship was present in the lives of his ancestors in Ohio and Virginia and contrasts it with current imbalanced incarnations in far flung Michigan. Returning with a restorative knowledge is his balancing act. I claim *Song of Solomon* is an example of a hero's journey.

1.1 Research & Method

Concluding *Song of Solomon* is a hero's journey is the result of a hermeneutic method of research. Correlations between the text and secondary sources are initially determined in the absence of a hypothesis. Morrison's lecture series published as *Playing in the Dark* (1990), which infers the presence and absence of African Americans in the works of several authors, provided some initial insight. Applying her knowledge as an author and scholar Morrison seeks, what is aptly summarized in her lecture "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" (1989) to reveal: "the ghost in the machine" (11).

The 'machine' Morrison seeks is a process in which a writer assembles a narrative and the 'ghost' is its agent. For example, Morrison includes her grandfather, Solomon, in a 1976 essay "A Slow Walk of Trees (as Grandmother Would Say), Hopeless (as Grandfather Would Say)" which overlaps with the writing of the novel. This indicates, to me, a close correlation. A mentoring relationship between genders and generations appears in the previously discussed "She and Me" (2002) suggesting *Song of Solomon* may have contributed to the writing of that essay. Content in "What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib" (1971) suggests the essay contributed to First Corinthians' characterization in *Song of Solomon*. In contrast "The Site of Memory" (1987) states that the death of Morrison's father caused the

writing of the novel and for the first time the choice of a male protagonist. Using a hermeneutic method of research, the texts speak for themselves and a hypothesis arises from assembling the layers of evidence. The correlations indicate, as a writer, Morrison explores a theme in essays before, during and after the development of a novel.

One study that considers the novel in its development stage is “Through a Glass Darkly: Typology in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (2005) and offers a compelling analysis of biblical influence on the characters. I argue for and against scenes selected in “Limping or Flying: Psychoanalysis, Afrocentrism and *Song of Solomon*” (2000) and “‘Anaconda Love’: Parental Enmeshment in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*” (1997) and contrast the psychological methods that are used.

Morrison’s own commentary indicated the importance of the novel’s ending. This focus lends reasonable assurance to an analysis of the assembly of the narrative. Morrison has stated that the end is her beginning, providing a point of reference. While the novel is being written, affirming the end scene is the objective. Acquiring this information, the end scene alone suggested, to me, signs of a prototypical hero’s journey. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was consulted and in the process of examining the novel against the stages of a quest, the virtue that Milkman defends clearly identified itself. Selected were two studies addressing comradeship between genders in the light of the African American diaspora: “Myth, Metaphor and Memory in Toni Morrison’s Reconstructed South” (1998) considers the geographical departure from Southern values with transition to Northern values and “The Politics of Space: Southernness and Manhood in the Fictions of Toni Morrison” (1998) focuses on the experience with Morrison’s masculine characters. These literary papers contribute to a larger pool of study concerning the African American diaspora.

Borrowing the model Morrison utilizes in *Playing in the Dark* to infer blackness and whiteness, a scene featuring a biblical misquoting in *Song of Solomon* was analyzed in order to infer its appearance. In other words, Morrison’s method was used on her own book. The biblical misquote, mentioned in the introduction to “Through a Glass Darkly” and observed in the essay “The Gospel According to Pilate” (1985), was analyzed against the author’s stated impetus for writing the novel and process of composition together with known features of a hero’s journey. Observed adherence to the stages of a quest, in support of historical and culturally relevant topics, combined with biographical accounts of authorship, induced the claim that *Song of Solomon* is an example of a hero’s journey.

2. Mythology and an African American family

The Dead family history is unknown to Milkman. His knowledge of ancestors, a specific man and woman at precise events in time, becomes a function of availability to their stories. Knowledge of history allows Milkman to contrast himself with the past, impacting his choices for the future, specifically to the benefit of Pilate. Consequently the protagonist will move from passive to active agency as he acquires his ancestry and exerts its influence. Milkman will bring merciful knowledge to Pilate and his example is contrasted with Guitar. Access to ancestral knowledge, particularly in an African American context, is fractured. As slaves were separated, families were inherently broken and displacement was a constant, causing stories to be lost and created. In “Myth, Metaphor and Memory in Toni Morrison’s *Reconstructed South*,” Deborah Barnes observes this evolution of cultural memory: “Only after migrants leave ‘home’ do they tend to regard their place in the South propitiously—a place where they were ‘whole’ and part of a whole” (par. 39). In essay and fiction Toni Morrison identifies virtues from African American history and fills its gaps with stories that stake a claim in a hybrid American history. Her works answer a need for a foundational mythology and with *Song of Solomon* Milkman Dead literally fulfills the role of the hero.

Just months before *Song of Solomon* was released Morrison published, “A Slow Walk of Trees (as Grandmother Would Say), Hopeless (as Grandfather Would Say).” Contrasting her grandmother’s and mother’s loving outlook with her grandfather’s and father’s material reductionism, Morrison considers a future for African Americans. Essay and novel exhibit close correlation, wherein knowledge gained from ancestry is shared and family wisdom is instilled. Morrison’s grandfather, John Solomon Willis, at the age of five hid under the bed when he heard an Emancipation Proclamation was coming and later the farm he inherited from his Indian mother was taken from him. These events resemble plot points Milkman discovers during his quest. Emancipated Jake becomes Macon Dead. Marrying an Indian woman, Sing Byrd, they leave the South and establish an idyllic farm in Ohio. In the essay, Morrison recounts her mother’s even countenance if bill collectors came to their door, having pressed her father into another room to boil out of sight. Once when her mother was not home, Morrison recounts her father threw a man down the steps. This resembles the fractured comradeship Milkman learns at home. In the marriage of Macon (Macon Sr. and Sing’s son) and Ruth, the cold materialism of the North has replaced virtuous comradeship. His mother is marginalized amongst his father’s rigid and arrogant need for material acquisitions.

In the essay Morrison likens progress to ‘a slow walk of trees’, where one view tempers the other. Her women think of regenerating life growing from the edges and her men know some are cut down. In this way a family’s story retains balance and shape. The Dead family is an antithesis of this progress. There is no regenerating life, as Macon and Ruth have no sexual relationship in their marriage and Macon is an unquestioned patriarch. Pilate is polarized in a female-only household and a supernatural matriarch. Milkman’s quest will lead him to Virigina where norms, if the word can be used, were present in the marriages of ancestral slaves. Their lives determined by hideous design; still a husband and wife found their roles and responsibilities to each other. The stories of their comradeship were hard earned and virtuous. The legend of Solomon’s leap concerns a mythical slave who flew back to Africa. This could be interpreted as disheartening for those who seek, as Morrison seems to do, to stake a claim in the American mythology rather than escape from it. Linking the Dead family to a lost ancestor, Solomon’s flight lends the family mythic proportions requiring a quest worthy of an archetypical hero.

Comradeship for the Deads is regained with Pilate and Milkman. Milkman has poor role models as a result of his parents’ infighting. Pilate has refused her daughter’s father as a potential husband (Morrison 149). The author circumvents these obstacles by translating a father-daughter relationship into a curious nephew seeking the doorstep of an aunt. The Dead stories of comradeship are lost but Milkman and Pilate revive a dynamic that they did not know was lacking. Ultimately expressed in mythic proportions as a moment of flight, the element that Milkman enters is air. Riding on air translates as fulfilling a depth of masculine character empowering his ascension. A complimentary depth of character is feminine and present in Pilate from birth. Because Solomon is forgotten, the mythical Dead power revisited in Pilate is without explanation. In the absence of parents, ancestry and comradeship with her brother Macon, Pilate lives much of her life in isolation. Milkman’s quest fills gaps in her identity, her history, her power. Solomon left his family, in particular a woman when he left the earth. Earth is Pilate’s element. Bringing her to Solomon’s Leap, Pilate “wouldn’t set foot on an airplane, so he drove” (Morrison 334). At her death Milkman knows: “Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly” (Morrison 336). When tragedy befalls Pilate, it is knowledge from Milkman’s quest which unites them, exemplifying comradeship.

2.1 What is an *idea virtuous*?

Families point to events in their histories which they identify as virtuous. About her own family Morrison has stated: “There was a comradeship between men and women in the

marriages of my grandparents, and of my mother and father. The business of story-telling was a shared activity between them, and people of both genders participated in it” (Morrison qtd. *Conversations* 140-41). With this point of reference identified as a virtuous idea for family life, the author may envision this virtue threatened. For the Deads in Michigan, there is no storytelling between genders and generations so when it occurs, Milkman is predictably enriched and the effect is multiplied after he reaches Ohio and Virginia. *Song of Solomon* affirms knowing ancestors as an integral act and a point of departure, not the destination. Milkman fairly ambles into his quest but once engaged does complete the steps of the genre, acquiring restorative knowledge of ancestry and returning selflessly to the benefit of Pilate. This act of comradeship is essential to Milkman’s quest.

In order to envision the virtue threatened, the author tears away masculine characters. In *Song of Solomon*, the virtue of comradeship is thrown into imbalance by a father’s passing. Solomon’s was mythic, riding on air and releasing himself from a life as a material possession. Pilate’s father is murdered, punctuated by a violent shot that “blew him five feet into the air” (Morrison 40). In both instances, the family left behind must fill in a space following a father’s passing. The events of the fathers’ deaths and how the family coped are withheld from the next generations. Milkman must complete a quest in order to acquire them. That children should hear the stories of their departed fathers is congruent with the cause for writing the book. Reflecting a decade later in “The Site of Memory,” Morrison is candid:

For the first time I was writing a book in which the central stage was occupied by men, and which had something to do with my loss, or my perception of loss, of a man (my father) and the world that disappeared with him. (It didn’t but I felt it did.) So I was re-creating a time period that was his-not biographically his life or anything in it; I use whatever’s around. But it seemed to me that there was this big void after he died, and I filled it with a book that was about men because my two previous books had had women as the central characters. So in that sense it was about my memories and the need to invent. I had to do something. I was in such a rage because my father was dead. The connections between us were threads that I either mined for a lot of strength or they were purely invention. But I created a male world and inhabited it and it had this quest-a journey from stupidity to epiphany, of a man, a complete man. It was my way of exploring all that, of trying to figure out what he may have known. (80)

2.2 Who is a virtuous hero?

In the history of the Dead family, Milkman is present when comradeship has fractured so wide that it might not recover. The family’s youngest member will become its redeemer. Macon and Pilate fled the family farm when their widower father was killed. This symbolic Eden is seized by neighboring white property owners and the siblings become estranged. The opportunity to witness the comradeship in their parents’ marriage and all links to ancestry are obstructed. Macon becomes a property owner himself and measures success by the number of

keys in his pocket (Morrison 22). His love of things gains over his love for Ruth. Pilate resides on the other side of town. Counting virtually no material possessions, her love is trained on daughter, Rebecca and granddaughter, Hagar. The two sides of the family have no contact and no spoken history. When the reader is introduced to a little boy, sitting backwards and looking out the rear window of his father's car, Milkman is described in a comradeship vacuum: "It was like flying blind, and not knowing where he was going- just where he had been" (Morrison 32). Milkman has implied access to flight but his destination, the past, fleets further from view. He is stagnant until the quest is engaged.

Judy Pocock's study, "Through a Glass Darkly: Typology in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," argues the Christian Bible's influence in Morrison's life and its translation into *Song of Solomon* characters. Comparing the novel's characters to biblical counterparts, Pocock's analysis claims: "[...] Morrison appropriates the methodology of Christian typology, and her primary strategy is to mobilize the typological power of biblical names" (282). The three generations of the family's men share a name: Macon Dead. Milkman, a nickname, discovers Macon Sr.'s given name was Jake. Pocock analyzes the biblical Jacob: "[...]one of the most complex and contradictory biblical characters" (292). The biblical Jacob's grandfather is the patriarch of a chosen people, he himself is born into a well-to-do family and his mother's womb is opened by God (Pocock 292-3). These elements are all present in Milkman's character, Macon and Macon Sr./Jake. Pocock further notes Jacob's struggle over the angel and conflict with brother, Esau suggest Milkman's relationship with Guitar (293). Appropriating Jacob, as Pocock argues, Milkman becomes intertextually instilled with the hero archetype, by design.

3. Comradeship, People and Places

In order to fulfill a heroic quest, plot points must illustrate the risks to success. Selected in this chapter are scenes which illustrate comradeship being achieved as well as collapsed. The author has stated having to write different beginnings but the ending comes first. The opening scene will be discussed first. A mysterious Sugarman song and a threat to successfully ride on air are written into Smith's leap at the novel's beginning. Smith is overhead, atop Mercy hospital, contrasted with rose petals on the ground. As he loses his balance a singing woman (Pilate) sends up her song. Morrison's illative description of Smith in the air reads: "Downtown the firemen pulled on their greatcoats, but when they arrived at Mercy, Mr. Smith *had seen the rose petals, heard the music and leaped on into the air*" (Morrison 9 italics added). The experience of seeing the petals as he actively 'leaped', not 'leapt', is relative to Pilate's voice. Smith plummets through the song to the petals on the ground; contrarily, seeing the petals and leaping, her voice follows Smith onward into the air. Smith seems to fail and yet successfully riding on air is possible. Mastering what Smith lacks, Milkman will successfully ride on air.

The opening leap assigns genders to elements; a man with air and specifically Pilate with earth. It also introduces a lone African American man in the North, working for a Southern company. The opening leap provides narrative contrast with Milkman's closing leap. Available on the CSPAN video archive, "*In Depth with Toni Morrison*" the author was asked: "How was Milkman finally able to fly and, when he says Pilate was able to fly without ever leaving the ground, what is flight and why can he fly finally?" Morrison's response:

Flight, for me, was part of an African myth before they were enslaved and when they came to this country they couldn't do it, but there were these exceptions that are in the myth and in trying to locate what slave stories were like, people always ask this question: did you ever hear of anybody who could fly? They said no or yes but never, what are you talking about? They all heard. It's a universal theme, everybody wants to fly. So I took what I thought was very specific and very general, the nothing of flight, as a kind of high point in the spiritual intellectual development of a human being. And so he goes over-into ground and into water in the baptism and river scenes, and then he leaps into this element which is the most unreliable element there is-as opposed to water or ground, but he goes there in this moment of complete generosity and confidence and risk. So that's his flight. On the other hand is the woman. You know, flight is a male thing. (2:35:36)

Ashley Tidey's study, "Limping or Flying? Psychoanalysis, Afrocentrism, and *Song of Solomon*" places the novel between Psychoanalysis and Afrocentrism, granting advantage to neither. Instead, Tidey's intent is to "focus the complex interrelation and interpretation of these psychological and cultural narratives[...] to suggest the benefits of investigating an

African American text such as *Song of Solomon* according to two distinctly different methodological approaches that challenge and thereby illuminate one another” (51-2). With the story isolated between two marginal perspectives, Tidey’s method acts as a tension inducer. Employing this model of separation, the pitfall of determining a psychology of fictional characters is avoided. The choice of Afrocentrism, as counter to Eurocentric Psychoanalysis, invokes a prescient awareness that culture affects psychology and effects interpretation. Morrison has discussed her comfort moving between these points of reference:

Black people rely on different sets of information, and we explain things in different ways. I mean, there was the education in schools and there was *our* education-and it was different. When we talked about what we dreamed, that was real-it wasn’t a Freudian anything! So that’s the effort-to put it together. (Morrison qtd. *Conversations* 135-6)

Citing multiple sources which verify flight to Africa as a significant theme in African American history, Tidey deems Smith’s flight in the opening sequence “in terms of African culture and the mythic resonances of the African American folktale[...] a failure, for he lacks the reality of collective, communal identity that one needs for a release of spirit. However uncertain the reasons for Smith’s flight/suicide, it is finally a singular and lonely act” (Tidey 61). By contrast, Milkman’s flight follows acquisition of ancestral identity in a Western country and culminates with communion with an elder/deity figure in the form of Pilate.

It is unclear who was meant to read Smith’s note when he posts his intentions on his door, two days before leaping (Morrison 3). Loneliness inherent in changing from Southern to Northern settings leads to disaster for Smith. In “The Politics of Space: Southernness and Manhood in the Fictions of Toni Morrison”, Herman Beavers focuses on characterization in relation to geography observing: “The North conjures itself as a benign setting by replacing the indignity and finality of disenfranchisement and lynching with the cyclicity of commodification, desire, and consumption” (III par. 1). Smith’s leap suggests the North may prove daunting for culturally Southern, African American men. Considered in this light, Macon’s character represents a half-caste between emancipated Macon/Jake and Milkman. Beavers articulates the forces acting on such characters:

Coming from the South, where so many Blacks lived as sharecroppers or who had land taken from them by unscrupulous Whites, the impulse to acquire, conserve, and manage material goods often leads those not yet able to purchase a space of their own to manifest a complex set of responses. (II par. 3)

Following Macon’s material example stalls Milkman engaging a quest which leads to the South and ultimately back to Pilate.

Tidey writes that Milkman returns to Pilate after “the inadvertent discovery” that the bones in her kitchen are of her father (Tidey 65). Discovering the bones in Pilate’s green sack,

a symbolic dead womb hanging in the air, is not inadvertent. The narrative structure necessitates Milkman acquiring the legend of the song in the South. Returning with it supports the method Tidey espouses in her study. Tidey's inducing agent is activated by Freud's concept of the death instinct as a function of successful renunciation of a maternal figure allowing for subjective mastery and peace with death, in opposition with a Afrocentric view where the self is incomplete without affirming connection to one's living tribe and ancestry (Tidey 50). Rather than disappear with the character Sweet, a romance sparked in Virginia, Milkman risks his life to return to Pilate. At this point in the novel, Milkman knows Guitar is tracking him and has already attempted his murder. Proof of tension between the Afrocentric and Psychoanalytic is again induced, aligned with Tidey's thesis. In addition to eliciting another example in support of Tidey's method, this choice is aligned with Campbell's analysis. Returning with a 'restorative' is a definitive stage in quest narratives and included in chapter four of this analysis.

3.1 How comradeship is achieved

Morrison's texts inscribe layers of meaning to the African American experience. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's ability to perform merciful acts which liberate a comrade is a function of his knowledge of ancestry. By claiming stories of Southern ancestry Deborah Barnes' study, "Myth, Metaphor, and Memory in Toni Morrison's Reconstructed South" considers such narratives within the African American experience:

Thus by regarding America (particularly the South) rather than Africa as the "home" in this land for Black people-that is, their "homeland"-they automatically become rightful heirs to America's legacy in the same way other immigrants, including indentured servants, have done. (par. 9)

Comradeship was realized, for a time, for emancipated Macon/Jake and wife Sing when they left Virginia for Ohio. Absent or marginalized in a Eurocentric portrayal of American history, in Barnes' view: "[Morrison's] fictions celebrate the authenticity of Black people's 'lived lives' by recording their experiences in, perceptions of, and reactions to American daily life against the backdrop of evolving history and culture" (par. 21). Sing's death while in labor is partly assuaged by Pilate's miraculous birth. Raised by their father, Pilate and Macon briefly prospered on the farm called Lincoln's Heaven, in Ohio.

Gary Storhoff's study, "'Anaconda Love': Parental Enmeshment in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*," considers the family as an interpersonal system and cites its critical term in footnote 2: "'Enmeshment' is a term coined by Salvador Minuchin to signify the parent's over-involvement in the child's emotional life that leads to the loss of psychological

boundaries in both parent and child.” Selecting Lincoln’s Heaven as a critical juncture in the story Storhoff writes: “Lincoln’s Heaven is not simply where Macon grew up, but a symbolic space. It represents a psychological anchor, a social site where different generations cooperate freely and generously, and where two sexes confront each other as equals” (par. 8). I agree with this interpretation of the farm’s significance but disagree that it is a site of enmeshment.

Enmeshment is passed down the generations, Storhoff claims, when Sing dies and Macon/Jake’s “Luciferian rage” effects the naming of his daughter: “His choice of ‘Pilate’ then, is his act of rebellion, his retaliation against God for what he perceives as cosmic injustice” (Storhoff par. 12). In contrast, the text describes an illiterate man, “confused and melancholy,” letting his finger choose a name on a Bible page and fate decides (Morrison 18-19). To exhibit enmeshment has taken hold of Macon, Storhoff invokes a partial quote: “he would re-create the land that was to have been his” (Storhoff par.8). This misinterprets the passage which recounts newlyweds, Macon and Ruth: “Sitting on the porch swing in the dark, he would re-create the land that was to have been his” (Morrison 51-2). It is the memory of Lincoln’s Heaven re-created. Half-caste Macon becomes obsessed with material possession in Michigan and ceases recalling the Ohio farm in his pursuit of property. Milkman had never heard him tell the story of his grandparents’ farm. “But now [Macon] was doing it again, with his son, and every detail of that land was clear in his mind” (Morrison 52). By re-telling, Milkman glimpses a deeper man: “His voice sounded different to Milkman. Less hard and his speech was different. More southern and comfortable and soft” (Morrison 52). Not enmeshed but liberated by the memory of his parents and their life on the farm, Macon releases his materialist perspective and exhibits a positive measure of masculinity for Milkman in this notably uplifting exchange. Also revealed in this scene is Macon Sr. had another name, before emancipation. Acquiring an ancestor’s name is a critical element of Milkman’s quest.

Comradeship between genders is presented in the characters of Porter and Milkman’s sister, First Corinthians. Her name is taken from the title of a New Testament book where sex is condemned and slaves should obey their masters. Pocock writes First Corinthians’ “liberation is one of the most perplexing events in the novel” (291). I will argue Corinthians’ liberation becomes clearer when considered alongside Morrison’s essay, “What the Black Woman Thinks about Women’s Lib.” An implicit lack of choice, Morrison observes, is stated by a pair of doors “[...]rather reassuring in its accuracy and fine distinctions: the pair that said ‘White Ladies’ and ‘Colored Women’” (Morrison 18). In the essay Morrison dismisses a universal guise of women’s liberation. Targeting such presumptions she concludes: “There is a horror of dealing with people one by one, each as he appears” (Morrison 20). In *Song of*

Solomon, First Corinthians' challenge is to consider her identity and presumptions of herself, her family and an unlikely suitor. Porter first appears as a foul-mouthed, urinating, shotgun-toting drunk at the start of the novel and later re-introduced as a mild-mannered, blue-collar gentleman "not wanting a doll-baby, but a woman" (Morrison 196).

Considering herself to be an educated genteel lady, First Corinthians faces an identity crisis by entering the servant's door. Her secret love affair with Porter coincides with her bus commute to a housekeeping job for an unmarried, white lady poetess, Michael-Mary Graham. "Miss Graham was delighted with Corinthians' dress and slightly uppity manners. It gave her house the foreign air she liked to affect for she was the core, the very heartbeat of the city's literary world" (Morrison 190). In contrast to a relationship that is materially motivated, Morrison recounts Porter is: "[...]giving her love instead of things, tenderness and care and respect. He can't give her a trip, he can't give her all those romantic things" (Morrison qtd. *Conversations* 70). Morrison's view of First Corinthians is plain: "[...]she didn't have anything else, she didn't have any 'raison d'etre.' Without him, I mean she was really 'out to lunch'" (Morrison qtd. *Conversations* 71). In surrendering a presumptive view of identity, First Corinthians and Porter find comradeship in a loving relationship. Macon discovers the secret affair, from Milkman, and is enraged. His sister Magdalena criticizes Milkman's pettiness (Morrison 215). He leaves town self-righteous and indignant, beginning the quest.

3.2 How comradeship collapses

As the novel's protagonist, Milkman evolves from the character in the most need of liberation, to the character in the best position to bestow mercy. The hindering Milkman's masculine development is manifest in Macon and Guitar, both of whom espouse manipulation of people and things. Both characters personify the limits of masculinity that is polarized, without a feminine influence. Milkman enters Macon's office door, marked Sonny's Shop, and follows his father in the business of property. He learns to own for the sake of owning. Strengthening his friendship with Guitar, the boys are roused out of a local bar and land in a bastion of masculinity: the barbershop. As a Classics minor, it is unsurprising that Morrison chooses to summon men to her hero as three 'choruses'. In the first encounter are the barbershop men, two of whom are collectively called the Tommys, firing off a bitter recitation of limits upon Milkman and Guitar, reminding them they are black (Morrison 59-61). Macon himself frequented the barbershop before beginning his material pursuits. As Beavers observes:

Considered alongside the ways that their bodies must adjust to urban life after spending most of their lives in rural areas, where contact with Whites is minimized-by custom and social edict-Northern versions of manhood prove to be just as elusive for these men as they do in the South. (II par. 6)

Guitar's violent divergence becomes incarnate in a secret group which dispenses vigilante justice. Beavers identifies Guitar's warped sense of manhood:

Guitar likewise renounces life in the domestic sphere, choosing instead to embrace violence as a surrogate for familial love and tenderness. This relation breaks down, of course, because the *Seven Days* is built on the inherently circumspect project of trying to flatten the criteria by which we assign value to human bodies in social space. (III par. 11)

Having moved from Alabama, the South, to Michigan, the North and been evicted from one of Macon's properties, grandmother Bains swears a solemn condemnation to young Guitar: "A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see. A terrible, terrible thing to see" (Morrison 22). Learning no compassion from male role models and ultimately equating bodies as commodities, Guitar shows he has learned none of the legacy from his Southern roots or grandmother. As a heroic foil, his character performs acts which are contrasted with the hero. Guitar returns to the South and kills a mature doe, foreshadowing his killing of Pilate (Morrison 85). Declining sweets, Guitar is hence the no-sugarman (Morrison 61). Milkman, in contrast, submits in his romance with 'Sweet' and realizes the ancestral Sugarman-Solomon link. The word Solomon morphed into Sugarman over time, Pilate's song before the opening leap. The power attributed to Solomon is also unknown to Pilate. Milkman brings the Dead mythology back home to Pilate.

Milkman abhors physical violence against women. This minimum threshold of character is exhibited in an early scene, included in Storhoff's analysis. Ruth baits Macon into anger, recounting how she fumbled her way through Catholic Communion at the Djvorak family wedding, only to meet the agitated priest at the reception. The priest lets the issue drop when Mrs. Djvorak interrupts to introduce "one of my dearest friends. Dr. Foster's daughter" (Morrison 65-6). Macon derides Ruth, arguing Djvorak calls her Dr. Foster's daughter because she doesn't even know her name and that Ruth, by herself "ain't nobody." Ruth agrees that she is her "daddy's daughter," smiles and Macon hits her (Morrison 67). Storhoff mistakenly credits Ruth as calling "[...] herself 'Dr. Foster's daughter' at the wedding" but I am inclined to agree that "[...] she deprives [Macon] of his delusory ownership of her and erodes his self-respect and masculinity" (Storhoff par. 32). Despite being indifferent to his parents at this stage in the novel and oblivious to the notion of comradeship, Milkman intercedes in the fight. As Barnes suggests: "Domestic cohesion, often a matter of need rather

than desire, abets mutual support, child perpetuation, and resource sharing in the Africentric [sic] home” (par. 24). Milkman’s action indicates there is hope for the character.

Initially oblivious to comradeship, Milkman’s inaction is epitomized by his wallowing through a doomed relationship with Hagar. Having lost interest, Hagar is callously likened to a third beer (Morrison 91). For her part, Hagar’s character is reported thusly:

They were always women who had been spoiled children. Whose whims had been taken seriously by adults and who grew up to be the stingiest, greediest people on earth and out of their stinginess grew their stingy little love that ate everything in sight[...]And they loved their love so much they would kill anybody who got in its way. (Morrison 306)

Raised by her grandmother, Pilate, and mother, Rebecca, Morrison states: “Hagar does not have what Pilate had, which was a dozen good years of a nurturing, good relationship with men” (Morrison qtd. *Conversations* 144). In Morrison’s view, the limitations of femininity are manifest in Hagar: “Some women are weak and frail and hopeless, and some women are not [...] In the development of characters, there is value in the different effects” (Morrison qtd. *Conversations* 145). Pocock finds parallels with the biblical Hagar who was “used sexually and discarded” when Sarah sends her handmaiden to Abraham to act as a surrogate (289). “Like her biblical type, Morrison’s Hagar is a misfit, lost in the wilderness of the materialistic north and unable to find her way back to the comfort of origins” (Pocock 290).

Determined to make Milkman love her, Pilate and Rebecca pawn items to buy Hagar her items of beauty, to no avail. Unable to own and possess love, Hagar collapses from a broken heart. Pocock considers Milkman’s eventual “rebirth” as “problematic” citing culpability in Hagar’s death (295). Morrison is oblique in assessing blame to Milkman, whose indifference is cruel:

It was carelessness that caused that girl pain. He has taken her life. He will always regret that, and there is nothing he can do about it. That generally is the way it is—there is nothing that you can do about it except do better, and don’t do *that* again[...]And he does not repeat the first mistake. (Morrison qtd. *Conversations* 146)

The demands of this interpretation are considerable but Hagar’s death and Pilate’s culpability creates a condition where the earth goddess hits rock bottom. While comradeship occurs peripherally for Corinthians and Porter, Pilate is at the center of its collapse. With no knowledge of ancestry to explain her and no masculine comrade, Pilate wields an unconditional love that is as misguided and ultimately poisonous as masculine materialism. With Hagar’s death, Pilate suffers tragedy of mythic proportions by being true to her nature. She explodes into the funeral scene “shouting, ‘Mercy!’ as though it were a command” (Morrison 316). As anger fills the character: “Pilate trumpeted for the sky itself to hear, ‘And she was *loved!*’” (Morrison 319). Tragedy adds complexity to the character and serves the

quest narrative by putting her in jeopardy. Pilate's cry at the air causes a bottle to crash. Milkman notably uses a broken bottle in defense of his quest and a third culminates with his return to Pilate, finding that she has withdrawn into deeper isolation.

4. A Hero's journey

The stages of a quest narrative are evidenced in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. A quest is symbolic of defending a virtue and emblematic of a culture and its author/s. Campbell writes: "Virtue is but the pedagogical prelude to the culminating insight, which goes beyond all pairs of opposites" (41). That cultures independently produce analogous, virtuous heroes constitutes a predictable byproduct of a rooted mythology, which Campbell terms a World Navel: "The World Navel, then, is ubiquitous. And since it is the source of all existence, it yields the world's plenitude of both good and evil" (Campbell 41). In addition to good and evil, gender pairs also feature prominently. Envisioning first a virtue and then a hero, s/he departs on a quest, returns with a restorative agent and balances the threatened virtue.

If *Song of Solomon* exhibits the documented features of a quest then this indicates a correlation. Campbell argues that any rooted mythology defends a virtue by envisioning a hero. Drawing on 20 years' experience with Random House as an editor developing manuscripts, Morrison argues no story is written in a vacuum. In *Playing in the Dark* Morrison identifies narrative and author as the dream and its dreamer and states: "As a writer reading, I came to realize the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer[...] In other words, I began to rely on my knowledge of how books get written, how language arrives; my sense of how and why writers abandon or take certain aspects of their project" (17). Research indicates that the impetus for writing *Song of Solomon* arrived after the death of the author's father. The intent was to create a male protagonist who must complete "this quest-a journey from stupidity to epiphany" (Morrison qtd. "Site of Memory" 80). The impetus for the novel and the essence of its quest are in correlation. Adopting the stages of a quest narrative would agree

Correlation may imply causation in the presence of a lurking factor which provides confounding evidence. That a fictional story has to make sense is ironic. Nonfiction can report dissociative events but a fiction writer must assemble plot points that serve a narrative. Research indicates Morrison assembles plot points which make the end scene true and incorporating the stages of a quest is amenable to said method. I will corroborate Morrison's method of assembly and supply confounding evidence to substantiate my claim that *Song of Solomon* is an example of a hero's journey by analyzing a biblical misquote in the novel. The true biblical line is the lurking factor, indicating that during the novel's assembly *Song of Solomon* was envisioned as a hero's journey, by design.

4.1 Assembling a Quest

Pocock's introduction includes mention of a misquoting of Matthew 21.2. The scene involves Milkman and Guitar held by the police, having been caught after stealing Pilate's green sack. The reader knows Pilate spied Milkman and Guitar running away with the sack wondering, "What the devil they want that for?" (Morrison 186). Pilate appears in a diminished size and speaks with a different voice, pleading for their release (Morrison 205-6). She tells the police it was a misunderstanding, the contents are the remains of a deceased husband: "Bible say what so e'er the Lord hath brought together, let no man put asunder-Matthew Twenty-one: Two" (Morrison 207). Pocock notes:

Matthew 21.2 actually quotes Jesus directing his followers to "Go into the village and... straightaway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them and bring them unto me" a Bible verse implying a far more appropriate metaphorical allusion to the matriarch's demand that the guards hand over the two reckless and selfish young men. (281-82)

With a thesis concerned with Morrison's biblical knowledge evidenced, Pocock proceeds to character analysis.

The misquoted line, 'What so e'er the Lord hath brought together, let no man put asunder' and the actual line reflect the complex relationship these characters have to one another. Brenda Marshall in her essay, "The Gospel According to Pilate" also recognizes the misquoting:

[Milkman] would be more astonished if he were familiar with the verse Pilate had referred to: "Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me." Guitar and Milkman are the ass and the colt tied, and Pilate is the one who goes to the station to loose them. (488)

The author has determined that only an implied reader may discover the misquote and a close reading of the actual line reveals: 'Go into the village over against you[reader], and straightway ye[reader] shall find an ass[Guitar] tied, and a colt[Milkman] with her[Pilate]: loose them, and bring them unto me[narrator].'

In this close reading, the process of a quest from stupidity to epiphany is corroborated with the stated impetus for the novel. At this moment Guitar, Milkman and Pilate are oblivious to the bag's actual contents. In direct correlation with Morrison's stated method of composing plot points which affirm the ending, these same characters are summoned to a distant village in their next and last scene together, the end scene which the author envisioned first. As Milkman and Pilate contribute to each other's liberation, Guitar is left to witness Milkman's epiphany. If *Song of Solomon* adheres to documented features of a quest, the claim of a hero's journey is fully evidenced. Milkman must prove himself worthy of acquiring

merciful truth, deliver this knowledge to Pilate and in so doing, restore comradeship between genders and generations in the Dead family.

4.2 Actions of a Hero

The Hero with a Thousand Faces maintains that struggles of heroes constitute a genre with predictable steps. The result is a hero restores an imbalanced virtue by completing a quest for a restorative agent. Returning with the 'restorative' marks an exit threshold and the hero must prove possession of said restorative. It is acquired favorably, or in disfavor, as a result of initiation with/against a mother goddess, a father god, or an apotheosis. Any combination of the three may be enacted. During trials of initiation a hero uses 'gifts' bestowed by a magical figure. Receiving such gifts, a hero crosses a threshold into a passage of separation from the world. The fledgling hero discovers this threshold by answering, or initially refusing, a call to adventure. I will borrow Campbell's method of presenting stages of the quest, documenting and discussing with examples from *Song of Solomon*.

A call to adventure is the moment a quest begins. A fledgling hero may answer the call directly or delay. The call itself is invariably linked to a character Campbell identifies as a herald: "The herald's summons may be to live, as in the present instance, or, at a later moment of the biography, to die" (Campbell 47). Morrison clearly identifies a herald and a moment: "That was the beginning" (Morrison 126). The line follows a coming-of-age scene for Milkman and mother, Ruth. Seen boarding a night bus, he suspects Ruth of having an affair and follows on the road out of town wondering "what man would want a woman over sixty anyway?" (Morrison 121). Confronted visiting her father's grave, Ruth staggers him with her truth:

I was small, but he was big. The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died. Lots of people were *interested* in whether I lived or died but he cared. He was not a good man, Macon. Certainly he was an arrogant man, and often a foolish and destructive one. But he cared whether and he cared how I lived, and there was, and is, no one else in the world who ever did. (Morrison 124)

Seeing Ruth as a person, a child to an unknown grandfather alters Milkman. Ruth is likewise affected: "Her son had never been a person to her, a separate real person. He had always been a passion" (Morrison 131). Ruth is loyal to her father's memory, providing some example that ancestry has a role to play. Pocock's typological analysis reveals that loyalty is the key to two Ruths:

Together, the [biblical] widow Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi conspire to ensure that Ruth will marry a man with wealth and power and, in this way, ensure Ruth's own security as well as Naomi's... she [Morrison's Ruth] does turn at crucial times to her sister-in-law Pilate. Together

they do everything they can to ensure a son. Pilate, here an antitype of Naomi, uses her magic to revive her brother's sexual desire and thus preserve her ancestral line. (288-89)

These women do complement each other: Ruth tries to tell Pilate that nobody lives forever, Pilate refuses saying death is the most unnatural thing (Morrison 140). Pilate holds a laundry man's dying heart, relieving his pain (Morrison 41). Ruth clings to her father's dying heart, refusing his release (Morrison 134). Pilate's late father appears to her and speaks. Ruth speaks to her father's silent grave. These complimentary voices provide critical feminine tutelage for the maturing hero.

When the call is refused, Campbell notes predictable delaying influences: "Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or 'culture,' the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved" (54). I refer back to the collapses that resulted from the first chorus, fractured masculine materialism and feminine love-possession. These collapses are perhaps best summarized in Macon's pronouncement to Milkman: "Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (Morrison 55). Campbell remarks when the call is heard: "That which has to be faced, and is somehow profoundly familiar to the unconscious—though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality—makes itself known; and what formerly was meaningful may become strangely emptied of value" (51). Milkman departs in arrogance. Arriving in Ohio and the remains of Lincoln's Heaven, he will question his father's materialism.

Assembled for Milkman is a second chorus, men who knew Macon Sr. With thundering voice the chorus addresses a gap in Milkman's knowledge, foreshadowing an imminent threshold:

Grab this land! Take it, hold it, my brothers, make it, my brothers, shake it, squeeze it, turn it, twist it, bet it, kick it, kiss it, whip it, stomp it, dig it, plow it, seed it, reap it, rent it, buy it, sell it, own it, build it, multiply it and pass it on-can you hear me? Pass it on! (Morrison 235)

The point of possession being to pass it on, is given to Milkman with such volume that it cannot be ignored. He seeks the farm. Campbell describes the entry: "The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown[...]" (83). Gifted with knowledge from the chorus implies a feminine voice may follow. Indeed at this stage there is equal likelihood for the appearance of "[...]a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (Campbell 63). Milkman encounters Circe, an impossibly old midwife who gifts clues about his paternal ancestry. Circe enabled Macon and Pilate's escape and their

mother was the only woman she ever lost in labor. This Indian woman met Macon in Virginia. "Her name was Sing" (Morrison 243). Armed with her name and a remote Virginia village, Milkman has focus and a destination.

His worldview being forcibly altered, Campbell describes this arrival of compressing forces: "[...]having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, he must survive a succession of trials" (89). Drawn to the South, Milkman discovers a stark contrast to values of home in a place "where there couldn't be more than two keys twenty-five miles around" (Morrison 266). In Solomon's general store a third chorus assembles. Milkman defends himself in a knife fight using a broken bottle. Humbled and accepted in the drawing of blood, his initiation includes invitation to join a hunt, representing another bastion of masculinity. It will contrast with the first chorus and honor the second. Milkman is separated in the wilderness and experiences a vision. This, Campbell reports, is to be expected: "In our dreams the ageless perils, gargoyles, trials, secret helpers, and instructive figures are nightly still encountered; and in their forms we may see reflected not only the whole picture of our present case, but also the clue to what we must do to be saved" (93). Apotheosis is presented when Milkman rests against a gum tree, "[...] surface roots cradling him like the rough but maternal hands of a grandfather" (Morrison 279). He sees an image of Hagar before him and hears the earth's message that Guitar is behind, about to kill him. The vision combines collapse and achievement by centering Milkman as he is "held by the maternal hands of a grandfather" with Hagar and Guitar on either side. Rejoining the men, a trapped bobcat is shot and the carcass eviscerated suggesting ritual and a kind of masculine womb accessed (Morrison 281-2). There is no degradation or foolery, these men are solemn.

The vision of sexual possession (Hagar) and material possession (Guitar) is juxtaposed by the labor of a hunt shared among the families, effectively passed on. Milkman has succeeded in his principal trial. A liberating romance, with a local woman called Sweet, proves Milkman can apply the lesson of Porter and Corinthians. He is ready for a Meeting with the Goddess. Campbell describes such a figure: "Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know" (106). Milkman is elated when the character Susan reveals she is descended from Sing's family and connects Jake to the mythical Solomon (Morrison 322). Reveling in the ancestral knowledge, Milkman does not detect the bitterness in Sweet's appraisal of Solomon's departure: "Who'd he leave behind?" (Morrison 328). Thinking only of bringing the knowledge to Pilate, Milkman nears the final stages. Campbell writes: "If the hero in his

triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron” (182). Guitar notably does not strike Milkman in the return home.

Crossing the return threshold, denial awaits a hero: “How to teach again, however, what has been taught correctly and incorrectly learned a thousand thousand times, throughout the millenniums of mankind's prudent folly? That is the hero's ultimate difficult task” (Campbell 202). Milkman enters to embrace Pilate and she breaks a bottle over his head (Morrison 331). The reader learns Pilate has made another container to possess the dead, a shoebox containing Hagar’s shorn hair. Pilate’s retreat into anger and uncharacteristic violence when Milkman returns matches Campbell’s analysis: “The encounter and separation, for all its wildness, is typical of the sufferings of love. For when a heart insists on its destiny, resisting the general blandishment, then the agony is great; so too the danger” (212).

A prisoner in the cellar, Milkman guesses something terrible happened to Hagar and he glimpses the agony that Solomon must have left behind (Morrison 332). Campbell describes such a moment of balance for a hero: “The problem of the hero is to pierce himself (and therewith his world) precisely through that point; to shatter and annihilate that key knot of his limited existence” (135). Milkman’s acquired empathy allows him to see Pilate’s misguided possession of the dead, the bones in the sack. Holding the shoebox, Pilate is staggered by his truth: “I’ve been carryin Papa?” (Morrison 333). The restorative knowledge is accepted and the quest is proved a success.

4.3 The question of a Heroine

In Pocock’s character analysis, Pilate is inferred as the novel’s heroine:

By choosing Pilate as her heroine’s name, Morrison travels into uncharted typology and extremely subversive territory[...] When Pilate sacrifices her life for Milkman; she usurps Christ’s role. It is through her death, not Jesus’s, that Milkman is saved. The truth that will set Milkman free is not the truth of Jesus but the truth that is “locked in music,” the truth that Pilate preserves in her bag of bones. Jesus is not the “way”; Pilate is. (294)

At issue is Guitar’s killing shot simultaneously announces he is in the scene without revealing his location (Morrison 335). Pocock’s inference of a sacrifice is not clearly evident and could render the development of the protagonist to an aside. Portraying Pilate as preserving the truth in her bag of bones is misleading. The author hides the true contents from Pilate and furthermore determines Pilate shall not understand the messages that her father’s ghost speaks to her.

As Campbell has indicated, denying restorative truth is a trademark stage of a quest. Morrison reinforces this point in “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” stating: “Unprogressive, unreconstructed, self-born Pilate is unimpressed by Solomon’s flight and knocks Milkman down when, made new by his appropriation of his own family’s fable, he returns to educate her with it” (29). Placing Pilate in jeopardy seems essential to the narrative. When asked if Morrison ever had to contain a character?

Pilate, I did. Therefore she doesn’t speak very much... she doesn’t have the dialogue the other people have. I had to do that otherwise she was going to overwhelm everybody. She got terribly interesting; characters can do that for a little bit. I had to take it back. It’s *my* book; it’s not called “Pilate.” (Morrison qtd. *Paris Review* ques. 48)

Atonement with the Father, evidenced with Campbell’s research of Christian typology, lends itself to Pilate’s character:

“God’s mere pleasure,” which defends the sinner from the arrow, the flood, and the flames, is termed in the traditional vocabulary of Christianity God’s “mercy”; and “the mighty power of the spirit of God,” by which the heart is changed, that is God’s “grace.” In most mythologies, the images of mercy and grace are rendered as vividly as those of justice and wrath, so that a balance is maintained, and the heart is buoyed rather than scourged along its way. (Campbell 111)

Discussing themes of flight and mercy in the novel, Morrison’s commentary on the latter, as it pertains to Pilate, includes another intriguing correlation with Campbell: “‘*Mercy*,’ the other significant term, *is the grace note*, the earnest though with one exception, unspoken wish of the narrative’s population” (Morrison qtd. “Unspeakable” 27 italics added). Campbell’s study discusses further how apotheosis adventures bring together feminine and masculine domains: “For in the first the initiate learns that male and female are (as phrased in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*) ‘two halves of a split pea’; whereas in the second, the Father is found to be antecedent to the division of sex [...]” (150). A dividing antecedent is evocative of Solomon’s mythic leap.

At the opening leap Pilate sings for a stranger. A child (Guitar) asks who is singing and his grandmother observes, “That, baby, is the very last thing in pea-time” (Morrison 8). Pilate is likened to a ripening pea. A maternal image of a swelled peapod may suggest Pilate’s ties to the pregnant Ruth, who is also in the scene and soon to give birth to Milkman. Pilate will be the infant’s protector and provided the potion Ruth gave to Macon, leading to conception. Ripening further foreshadows lifecycle imagery where pod and pea are separate and joined. Pilate arguably recognizes Milkman’s power of flight in the end scene, before he does. Having argued Morrison summons the masculine voice as a ‘chorus’, a complimentary role from Greek drama is a singular ‘mentor’. Her death fulfills a narrative compact wherein a

mentor departs before a hero ascends. Had Pilate known the comradeship of her parents' marriage, perhaps she would have loved more and taken Rebecca's father for a husband. It is instead a surprising nephew who proved to be her masculine comrade. Her example reminds Milkman not to strike Guitar in vengeance but to show him the life that he could have. This knowledge and this choice engender Milkman's epiphany and empower his flight.

5. Conclusion & Future Research

Comradeship was proved to be the virtue of the novel's quest. Milkman completed the stages of a hero's journey. The impact on African Americans moving from Southern to Northern settings, affecting knowledge of ancestry, in turn impacting identity in family and gender roles was discussed at length. Translating these elements into books and essays, Morrison's works collectively contribute to stories of the African American diaspora. Considered in this light, Campbell's analysis not only outlines a quest, it predicts an established African American identity will produce quest narratives. This topic could perhaps be furthered by an analysis of *Song of Solomon* with Morrison's novel, *Home* (2012). Written following the death of her son, *Home* is the story of a brother who leaves the Pacific Northwest and returns to the South for a sister. While a hermeneutic method proved effective in identifying *Song of Solomon* as a hero's journey, a deliberate comparative analysis with *Home* might be fruitful.

I have argued Pilate's role as a mentor to the hero has a reasonable probability considering Morrison's academic studies of Classical drama, the collective choruses of men and the limits placed on the beguiling Pilate by the author. I found no evidence that Morrison researched Campbell's study of the heroic archetype but the correlations with 'mercy' and 'peas' is intriguing.

Pilate and Milkman's relationship ostensibly mirrors the mentoring relationship Morrison credits to her father's memory. A complimentary balance of roles, genders and generations points to comradeship as a theme. Comradeship being prized by the author and realized in the generations of the mythical Dead family may suggest why, when asked in a February 2001 CSPAN interview to recommend a title as a first-read, *Song of Solomon* was Morrison's answer (*In Depth* with Toni Morrison). *Song of Solomon* exhibits exact adherence to the narrative stages of a quest and Milkman as its hero. Close analysis of the text exhibited evidence confirming Morrison's stated method of assembling plot points which affirm the ending. Morrison's method of assembly is further found to be amenable to incorporating the stages of a quest. The fathers did soar and the children did know their names.

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