

Aleksandra M. Izgarjan  
Odsek za anglistiku  
Filozofski fakultet  
Univerzitet u Novom Sadu  
aleksandraizgarjan@ff.uns.ac.rs

doi: 10.19090/zjik.2016.305-322  
UDK broj: 821.111(73).09-31 Morrison T.  
Originalni naučni rad

## METAPHOR OF FLIGHT IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVEL *SONG OF SOLOMON*

*ABSTRACT:* The paper examines the metaphor of flight in Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*. The author uses the myth of Flying Africans to emphasize the duality of the metaphor of flight and subversive undertones which allow for different interpretations. Due to the complexity of the metaphor of flight in Morrison's novel, the paper will employ the theoretical frameworks of magic realism, the praxis of Othering proposed by Edward Said in his *Orientalism* and Jungian concept of archetype as it refers to flight and flying. The focus is particularly on the way Morrison employs magical realism to fuse master narratives of the Western civilization with the ones pertaining to African American community and in turn questions the process of construction of history and community. Morrison's insistence on commonality of flight, as a universal human impulse, that can be found both in African (American) and Western lore, gives credence to her characters' ability to fly.

*Key words:* metaphor, flight, Morrison, myth, history.

*A metaphor is a way of seeing something,  
either familiar or unfamiliar, in a way you can grasp it.*

Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison employs the complex metaphor of flight in her award winning novel *Song of Solomon* in order to highlight the dualistic nature of flying. While on the one hand flight evokes excitement that comes with surpassing human limitations, it also encompasses disparate elements of life and death, hope and loss. In order to explore complexity of the metaphor of flight in Morrison's novel, I will use the theoretical frameworks of magic realism, the praxis of Othering proposed by

Edward Said in his *Orientalism* and Jungian concept of archetype as it refers to flight and flying.

Given many definitions of the term magical realism, I will use here the one provided by Zamora and Faris which states that it refers to all narratives which use a realist matter-of-fact tone to describe magical happenings: "The supernatural is not a simple or an obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, and everyday occurrence - admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism." (1995: 3) *Song of Solomon* contains all the usual features of magical realism: mixture of magic and realistic, inexplicable phenomena such as ghosts and people flying, complex plot structure, time shifts as well as "inclusion of the energies of fable, folk tale, and myth while maintaining a strong contemporary social relevance." (Baldick 2015: 210) The framework of magical realism allows us to analyze the ways Morrison historicizes African American experience which has too often been marginalized or erased from the mainstream American history.

Zamora and Faris argue that the theory of magical realism must provide an approach to history and not only literary genres given that in the works of magic realism history and community are "inseparable cultural constructs" (1995: 9-10). Magical realism "realizes the conjunction of ordinary and fantastic by focusing on a particular historical moment afflicted or graced by the doubleness." (Mikics 1995: 10) Each instance of flight in the novel can be read as such historical moment when two communities struggle with their incompatible belief systems. In the fashion of magic realism writers, Morrison uses the magic inherent in flight to subvert the Western belief system and insert in it African American one. As postcolonial scholars have argued, competing codes of realism and fantasy deconstruct colonial cultural programs through creation of counterdiscourse and countercommunity (Zamora and Faris 1995: 10). As a narrative mode, magic realism offers "a way to discuss alternative approaches to reality to that of Western philosophy." (Bowers 2004: 1) I will particularly focus on the way Morrison employs magical realism to fuse master narratives of the Western civilization with the ones pertaining to African American community and in turn questions the process of construction of history and community.

The flight in the article will be viewed on the level of the individual and community. On the individual level, Morrison's flyers, particularly Milkman Dead, resemble mythical characters, such as Icarus and Odysseus. The article will trace the elements of the hero's quest as well as Jungian archetypes in order to show how Morrison, through similarities to the Western myths, gives the flights in the novel

validity and universality. On the level of community, flight also contains universal traits: yearning for freedom, transcendence, return and salvation. From artificial/mechanical flight, ancestral flight to spiritual flight, Morrison's heroes rise above limitations and achieve balance between opposite principles (masculine/feminine, ancient/modern, black/white, West/Africa). This universality of flight reflected in human desire to rise above commonality of daily existence and reach sublime serves as a middle ground between conflicting cultures in the novel. It can be therefore said that the metaphor of flight can be perceived at the same time as a vehicle for unison and division.

Morrison stated that in *Song of Solomon* she blended "the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time, without one taking precedence over the other." (1984: 342) This is particularly evident in the legend of flying Africans which stands at the core of the novel. In it, "the mythical and the historical coexist and, indeed, nurture each other" (Foreman 1995: 297). The legend was widespread in African American, Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean communities, that is, communities which were oppressed by slavery. Walters, for example, cites occurrences of the stories about Flying Africans in geographic regions connected to the Atlantic slave trade - Suriname, Caribbean and Jamaica:

Both Africa and the Americas contribute to the socio-historical circumstances that produce a background for the legend of the Flying Africans. On the most obvious level, the legend is an invocation of the return as a pan African theme. An image such as the Flying African, the theme of nostalgia and return, become parts of collective memory because of the deep structural similarities existing between and among disparate diasporic cultures. Since such cultures are not monolithically unitary, the legend's context is ever changing and so is the legend itself (1997: 6).

It is not hard to imagine that the legend was created to give comfort and enable people to dream about escape, to believe that at least some could save themselves and go back home. In the stories, the Flying Africans are often described as abstaining from eating salt or having knowledge of powerful African words which enables them to fly, but also posits them clearly across from the white slave holders. In Walters' opinion, ability of slaves to fly is firmly connected to their African heritage. Abstinence from salt points to their refusal of the diet of white slave holders and Christian baptism (often performed by sprinkling salt on the tongue of

the baptized) while remembering words of African language is an act "which emphasize[s] the flyer's own heroism and spiritual investment in Africa as home" (1997: 13). King finds both universal and specifically African American traits in the legend of Flying Africans. She argues that images of "individual or collective flight as resistance to New World chattel slavery, or as transcendence of dehumanizing constraints and restrictions in general, figure prominently in Black American literature and folklore." (2003: 122) Flight is a signal of spiritual rebirth, "so the question of whether those who take flight to escape oppression survive in a physical sense is less important than the fact that they are no longer oppressed." (King 2003: 122)

The stories concerning the Flying Africans also contain subversive undertones: instead of believing that their fellow sufferers committed suicide during the Middle Passage by leaping overboard or that they submitted to whips of slave holders, the narrators maintained the Flying Africans actually flew home. Morrison integrates the images of hope and survival with those of death while using the stories about the Flying Africans since they sustained people during their torturous path to freedom. At the core of the legend is a careful balance of belief and disbelief and the choice of the flyer and the spectator which alternative they will believe in. Readers of Morrison's work need to allow for the elements of magic realism and possibility of different interpretations and existence of different worlds. In Morrison's words:

But my meaning is specific: it is about black people who could fly. That was always part of the folklore of my life; flying was one of our gifts. I don't care how silly it may seem. It is everywhere - people used to talk about it, it's in the spirituals and gospels. Perhaps it was wishful thinking - escape, death, and all that. But suppose it wasn't. What might it mean? I tried to find out in *Song of Solomon* (qtd. in Van Toll).

This quote is crucial for the complex layering of the metaphor of flight in the novel. On the one hand, Morrison classifies the legend of the flying Africans as folklore. On the other, by stating that it is apart of the folklore of her life, of culture and tradition of African American community, she firmly ties it to its history. Despite folkloric background, she eschews the reading which might relegate the legend to the realm of fantasy, deciding to treat fantastic as real. Morrison's matter-of-fact descriptions of various instances of (im)probable flights in the novel which make it fall within the framework of magical realism. She underlines the importance

of not just her individual realistic approach to the legend, but also mutual consensus of the whole community to treat it as real and to use it as a foundation of its tradition. Foreman observes that magic realism, "unlike the fantastic or the surreal, presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and the faith of the community, that s/he is historically constructed and connected." (1995: 286) He quotes Marguerite Suarez-Murias who claims that the marvelous "presupposes an element of faith on the part of the author or the audience." (qtd. in Foreman 1995: 286) We find this element of faith in Morrison's novel which follows the attempt of its alienated main protagonists to find a bond with their community. Their quest for individual identity revolves around the metaphor of flight since it bears of the contradictions inherent in the legend of Flying Africans and the ability of men to rise above their limitations or limitations imposed upon them by society which stem from racism, sexism, classism and other forms of oppression.

It is also important to note that by giving the central place in the novel to the legend of Flying Africans, Morrison rejects previous prejudiced interpretations of it. In her analysis of a number of collections of narratives which contain stories about Flying Africans, Walters observed that the collectors who wrote down these stories classified them under headings such as superstition and interpreted African words and dialect present in them as nonsense. Conversely, Morrison uses the same words as symbols of ancestral language and culture. Walter's example of the treatment of African American oral heritage shows how the legend's "oppositional power" was reduced in scientific texts on the legends (1997: 11). It is a prime example of the process of Othering in which the ethnic minority is relegated to the margins of society and its practices erased or devalued. Said in his discussion on Orientalism, showed how the dichotomy between the western and eastern world has been established and perpetuated through the process of Othering. The Other is perceived as non-European self and thus inferior and in need of uplifting (Said 1977: 54). Morrison reverses the binary opposition in which the white is dominant and African American the Other. The novel demonstrates that when seen in the context of literature, as opposed to social scientific collection, the legend of Flying Africans is alive and capable of "offering important contributions to culture development." (Walters 1997: 5).

*Song of Solomon* opens and closes with two flights. The inaugural flight of an insurance agent Robert Smith contains a number of images which place it unmistakably in the framework of African American history and legend. The first sentence of the novel describes Robert Smith's flight: "The North Carolina Mutual

Life Insurance agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o'clock" (Morrison 1978: 3). It is followed by his suicide note in which he is asking for forgiveness and professing love, thus immediately associating flight not just with possibility and compassion, but also with death and suicide. Morrison makes a careful distinction between Smith's flight and that of Lindbergh, which generated more interest, drawing a much larger crowd. However, while Lindbergh's feat is accomplished due to the advancement of technology and relies upon mechanical devices, Smith's flight remains in the realm of mystery. His only props are the blue silk wings he made himself. He is the agent of flight, but also an agent of history and life. He sacrifices his life to remind his people of their ancestors. In doing so, he invites his people, along with the readers to accept possibility of flight. Morrison suggests that the answer to the possibility of flight can be found in mercy and commitment to the community:

The insurance agent does not declare, announce or threaten his act. He promises, as though a contract is being executed - faithfully - between himself and others. [...] So the agent's flight, like that of the Solomon in the title, although toward asylum (Canada, or freedom, or home, or the company of the welcoming dead), and although it carries the possibility of failure and the certainty of danger, is toward change, an alternative way, a cessation of things-as-they-are. It should not be understood as a simple desperate act, the end of a fruitless life, a life without gesture, without examination, but as obedience to a deeper contract with his people. It is his commitment to them, regardless of whether, in all its details, they understand it. There is, however, in their response to his action, a tenderness, some contrition, and mounting respect ('They didn't know he had it in him') and an awareness that the gesture enclosed rather than repudiated themselves (Morrison 1978: 20).

Smith's flight traces the trajectory of the flight of African slaves. He flies across water just like they flew over ocean back to Africa or over rivers and lakes to freedom in the North. He leaves behind him women and children who are watching him, foreshadowing the flight of the slave Solomon later depicted in the novel and emphasizing the element of toss in flight since the flying slaves left their compatriots behind in the cruel South. Smith's flight is accompanied by the song of the main female character Pilate, about her grandfather Solomon. She laments not just Smith and the others who flew away, but also all those they abandoned,

incorporating the blues tradition in the novel. On the other hand, it also incorporates western mythology since Smith can be compared to Icarus. Both of them try flying with artificial wings and die during the attempt. Both are escaping from confines, Smith from racism and poverty; Icarus from imprisonment in the labyrinth. Ultimately, they fly away from death.

This similarity gives mythical dimension to Smith's flight and enables Morrison to probe into various perceptions of flight in different cultures. Comparison with mythical figures allows Morrison to question the paradigms which were accepted as master narratives and building blocks of Western culture. At the same time, African legends of flying people are treated as superstition and nonsense or, at best, stories about tragic heroes who would rather commit suicide than remain in slavery. Morrison makes a careful distinction between Western heroes who are spurred by personal ambition and African American ones who are committed to their communities. She devalues Western myths and shows their inapplicability to African American culture. This privileging of African American perspective cancels binary oppositions inherent in the process of Othering.

The possibility of flight is simultaneously confirmed and destabilized throughout the novel. The artificiality of Smith's wings is suggestive of his disconnection from his heritage. He is removed from "the secret knowledge or the magical word associated with flight." (Abed 2013: 70) This secret knowledge usually referred to elements of conjuring practices still alive among the African slaves when they arrived to America (Walters 1997:10). The emphasis on communal knowledge, on special African words which have been orally transmitted, reflects Morrison's belief that exodus to the North robbed African Americans of their rootedness in ancestral culture. Their alienation from the African heritage made it more difficult for them to struggle with racism and marginalization in wider American society. With the story of flying Africans, which she transposes into contemporary African American history, she tried to provide her people with new legends they can use. In that sense, the stories of flights, particularly the original one of flying slaves, should not be perceived as calcified piece of folklore stuck in the past, but rather as a vehicle for transformation of canonical tales of black community. According to Morrison, "we don't live in places where we can hear those stories anymore; parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical, mythological, archetypal stories that we heard years ago. But new information has got to get out, and there are several ways to do it. One is the novel." (1984: 340) In her transformation of the legend of Flying Africans, Morrison articulates a

counterdiscursive historiography of slavery (Walters 1997:3). Unlike collections of folklore stories which are viewed as static, Morrison's novel functions as a dynamic site for contextualizing the legend. The legend becomes alive when it is revealed and relived. Thus, Smith's flight serves as an introduction into the search for meaning of flight.

Debilitating effects of the loss of tradition which hamper Smith's flight are particularly evident in the life of the main protagonist of the novel, born one day after Smith takes off from Mercy. Once Milkman realizes at the age of four "the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier - that only birds and airplanes could fly," (1978: 9) he loses all interest in himself Milkman spends the next thirty two years uninterested not so much in himself as in people around him. He leads a privileged life of the richest man in the community; he is detached from his parents and sisters and alienated from African American community. Only when he sets off on a chase for the family gold he believes his aunt Pilate has hidden in a cave in Pennsylvania, he starts tracing the journey back to the past of his family and community. He flies for the first time in his life in an airplane and this flight gives him an exhilarating feeling of being up in the air. It is important to note that Morrison here again makes a distinction between an airplane flight, which "encourages illusion" (1978: 222) and magical flight which "presupposes faith" (Carpenter 1995: 86). Being artificial, and not coming from a spiritual core, Milkman's flight is based on egotism and escapism. Like Smith's, Milkman's first flight can be compared to that of Icarus since they both issue from selfish ambition to rise above common people. Egotistic and reckless like Milkman, Icarus is spurred by exhilaration of flight to such an extent that he forgets about dangers surrounding it. Both of them fly in order to find freedom from burdensome past. By infusing Milkman's flight with parallels with Greek mythology, Morrison gives a heroic status to her protagonist. However, unlike Icarus', Milkman's obsession with flight leads him to spiritual transformation which is firmly situated not in the Western cultural framework, but in ancestral, African one.

Milkman's return to the South has a ritualistic, mythological dimension. Shalimar, the site of his great-grandfather Solomon's flight, can be described as an utopia, both in terms of racial relations given the fact that it represents an integrated black community, completely independent of the larger white society as well as the impression that it exists frozen in time making its inhabitants well versed in African American (folk)lore. Milkman is free from all the constraints in his life, mistakes he has made, people he has hurt. On the surface, the purpose is to find gold that lemon



and Pilate found in a cave where they escaped after their father was killed. But as it turns out, Milkman recovers a 'treasure' in the form of a lost past a lost myth, a lost name (Coward 1997: 97). Milkman is able to claim his family name for the first time, to enjoy sharing stories of his family. Milkman undergoes a process of change similar to those we find in the stories about mythical heroes. He slowly sheds all vestiges of his former self in the shape of his fancy suit, expensive watch and shoes. His quest contains many of the elements described in Carl Jung discussion on the journey of mythical hero and the archetypes employed in it (1978: 105487). A number of them can be found in this part of the novel; the most important being the forest, cave and bird.

Milkman is taken on a hunt by local black men and the sojourn in the forest turns into a rite of passage for him. Although he is afraid that he might get hurt, he resolves to take up the challenge and to stop "evading things, sliding through, over and around difficulties." (Morrison 1978: 274) He gets lost and sits under a tree. In his discussion of archetypes in the journey of a mythic hero, Jung describes the scene of a hero retiring under a tree as a refuge in the mother. At this point, the hero often receives help in the form of a bird which represents stirring of intuition symbolized by the helpful mother (Jung 1978: 48220). Following this pattern, Milkman feels the tree's maternal branches, cradling him as a grandfather, which symbolizes his fusion with nature and his heritage. Milkman starts thinking about his life and, in a profound moment of revelation, perceives how selfishly he has behaved toward everybody in his life. He understands that his fancy clothes and watch do not mean anything in the forest, the place where a man's life depends on his senses and skills. As he looks back upon the behavior of old black men who took him to the forest, he appreciates the harmony between them, dogs and even the prey and the forest, it goes back all the way to primeval times when language did not even exist, before things were written down and men could talk to animals. It seems to Milkman, as he sinks his fingers into the soil, that he can understand men like his father, who have been so hurt by white people that they were maimed and lost this connection with the land.

Milkman emerges from the forest as a changed man; his leg is no longer shorter than the other, metaphorically representing his new found balance. He continues his quest and finds Circe, an old black woman who saved his father's and aunt's life after their father was murdered by white men. Circe lives in an abandoned mansion which belonged to the white family responsible for the death of Milkman's grandfather. She is described as an ancient woman who lives surrounded by

multitude of dogs. Her only objective is to have the white family's mansion completely destroyed as payment for the abuse they inflicted upon black people. Encounter with Circe is another important step in Milkman's journey since he confronts his fears of black women personified by witches. Rather than scare him, Circe helps him by revealing another piece of the puzzle in his family history: his grandfather and grandmother's real names, Jake and Sing. She also tells him that his grandfather's bones were left in a cave and Milkman gathers courage to enter the cave and search it. Introduction of Circe establishes a parallel between Odysseus and Milkman in their universal human need to find home. On the other hand, Morrison reverses negative portrayal of women making Circe a positive character, and more importantly a strong black woman who triumphs in the end. The encounter with Circe gives Milkman strength to enter a cave where his father and aunt killed a white man. While comparing Circe from Homer's *Odyssey* to Morrison's novel, Catherine S. Quick concludes that although Milkman does not find gold in the cave, like the trip of Odysseus to the Hades (on instructions from Circe), his trip to the cave which is his Hades is the first step in his journey home (2003: 148).

The forest and the cave serve as mysterious realms the hero has to go through. Campbell in the analysis of monomyth calls them the whale's belly since in this realm the hero experiences death and returns transformed to bring to his world the boons he has acquired (2008: 74). Jung associated the cave with unconscious and netherworld the hero has to enter in order to be transformed and to find treasure (1978: 48448). Milkman is no longer obsessed with the trappings of flight and gold which Morrison equates with selfishness and vanity embodied in the metaphor of peacock Milkman sees before his journey. The peacock cannot fly but just shows off its flashy tail and "fat pigeon-breasted bags of gold" (1987: 255) Milkman searches for. He finally sees through this illusion and realizes that the real treasure is his family's past, the meaning of their names and not desire for gold which has twisted his father into a dead and bitter man and which weighed Milkman down preventing him to fly. According to Lovalerie King, Milkman can fly only after he frees himself from an endless quest for Western materialism (2003: 123) which is reflected in his refusal to continue the quest for gold turning instead to the search for family lore.

Milkman's awareness of the community, the culture, and the natural world around him leads him to reassess his family as well as his own selfishness. According to Jung, in order to achieve realization, without which the spirit remains suspended and never comes down to earth, it must rise above "the collision between the paternal and the maternal principle (spirit and nature) which works like a shock

on him." (1978: 107564) Milkman comes to terms with his Oedipal complex since he realizes the nature of his relationship with his mother who has nursed him until he was four years old (Abed 2013:70). He becomes sympathetic to both his mother's pathetic helplessness and his father's distorted ambition. His understanding encompasses both those he hurt and those who were out to "kill" him (Wilentz 1997: 125-26).

Juxtaposed with the obsession his mother and lover Hagar have for Milkman is his relationship with Sweet. He helps her around the house and treats her as an equal. Drawing on Freud's analysis of the sexual significance of flight (symbolizing sexual excitement and erection), Abed connects Milkman's newly fashioned manhood to his attempt at flying which follows the Shalimar episode. She uses Morrison's casting of Milkman's flight as sexual: "Finally Milkman is able to surrender to the air and ride it at the same time which to me is ... [a] sexual act associated with dominating [a] woman ... [but] also surrendering to her at the same time." (Abed 2013: 70) The simultaneous act of domination and surrender speaks to the notion of reciprocity in Milkman's relation with Sweet. With Sweet, Milkman both dominates and surrenders to her care and love. With his mother and with Hagar, he merely surrendered to their love before totally rejecting it. In contrast, in his relationship with Sweet there is synthesis between domination and surrender (Abed 2013: 70) which reflects his liberation from ego. This turns out to be crucial in his quest for the clues in the story of Flying Africans.

The final stage in the quest is marked with reappearance of the symbols related to flight reinforcing the tie between individual and communal history and paternal and maternal principles. The story about his male ancestors, Jake and Solomon, is punctuated by the names of his female relatives, Sing and Susan Bird. After his transformation, Milkman is capable of understanding the riddle in the children's song about his fabled ancestor Solomon who was capable of flight. His ability to solve the puzzle testifies to the fact that he has completed the journey into the family past and learned what was necessary to decipher the codes. The codes can be perceived as the secret word necessary to flight mentioned in the narratives about Flying Africans (Walters 1997: 10). According to the legend, his great grandfather Solomon, an African slave, flew back to Africa leaving behind his wife and twenty one children, among them Milkman's grandfather Jake, later named Macon Dead. Milkman is overjoyed to hear that his ancestor was able to fly, something he always desired to do. His enthusiasm echoes Carpenter's claim that magic realism is inextricably linked to exaltation of the spirit leading it to an extreme state (1995: 85-

86). Imbued with a sense of power, Milkman starts believing in miracles which is precisely the function the stories of Flying Africans used to have during slavery when slaves needed inspiring stories to alleviate their suffering.

Morrison goes beyond the level of magical realism merging once again individual and communal levels. She provides Solomon's story both with autobiographical and mythical quality. Her grandfather's name was Solomon and, just like Milkman's ancestors, he was a former slave who ran to the North after the white people took his land in the South. However, the name Solomon is also heavily invested with different layers of meaning. Immediate association of course is "Song of Solomon" from the Bible which contains the verse "I am black but comely" (1955: 1:56). Morrison reminds her readers that the Biblical Solomon, whom many Christians accept and admire as a wise king, was black. In doing so, she is giving more weight to the claim of African Americans that their roots reach all the way back to the dawn of time, to Egypt and Mesopotamia, once great civilizations and cradles of human race. Her objective is not very different from that of Langston Hughes, for example, who also in his works evoked great African empires to instill pride in his African American readers. Disillusioned with American society, African Americans often turned to African past to find role models different from American ones, larger than life mythical figures, unchained by slavery and poverty. Solomon represents precisely one such figure.

Morrison also uses Solomon's episode to fuse western culture with African American. There is another association with the story of Icarus and Daedalus, since like Daedalus, Solomon leaves his son behind when he flies away. Morrison is careful to emphasize that while the story about Solomon undeniably transforms Milkman, departure and loss are also inherent parts of the story about flying. Of all African American flyers in the novel, in his ambition and willingness to abandon his community, Solomon comes closest to the Western mythical heroes like Icarus, Daedalus and Odysseus evoked by Morrison. She censures him by undercutting heroism of his flight with the story of his abandoned wife Ryna and twenty one children among whom is Milkman's grandfather. At this point in his quest, Milkman has sufficiently matured to be able for the first time to appreciate less glamorous aspect of his great grandfather's flight and bereavement of those who are abandoned. "The song does not glorify his greatgrandfather Solomon's flight. It speaks of a voice that bemoans his loss, a voice that does not wish to be abandoned" (Hogue 1996: 44). This realization forces Milkman to come to terms with his behavior towards Hagar whom he pushed into death with his callousness:

He had hurt her, left her, and now she was dead - he was certain of it. He had left her. While he dreamt of flying, Hagar was dying. Sweet's silvery voice came back to him: 'Who'd he leave behind?' He left Ryna behind and twenty children. Twenty one since he dropped the one he tried to take with him. And Ryna had thrown herself all over the ground, lost her mind, and was still crying in a ditch. Who looked after those twenty children? (1978: 336)

Morrison makes a point by having the children sing the song about Solomon. It survives despite his departure and his flight continues to be an inspiration. However, the children do not know about whom they are singing, parts of the story and the names of people in it become distorted as happens in oral tradition since during transmission the context disappears. It takes Milkman's new found knowledge of the background story to decipher the code. He must trace back his lineage and gather all the pieces scattered in various stories about his family in order to solve the puzzle of the song and in turn complete the quest for his identity. As Waiters observes, for Morrison, this identity is a collective construct connected to a broad sense of history and community (1997: 16). This foregrounding of collective, rather than individual identity can be seen in Milkman's realization that he, for the first time, made a strong connection not just to his ancestors, but also to his people. Shalimar feels like a home for him who never felt at home in his father's house filled with hatred and contempt (Izgarjan 2014: 29).

As he ponders his childhood and family history, Milkman finally acknowledges Pilate as his greatest teacher who showed him the sky. By comparing it to the ribbons on her mother's bonnet she made it familiar to him for the first time. Pilate tells Milkman stories from the family's past, enabling him to claim his name and his ancestry and get in touch with racial memory, not just of his family, but of the whole community (Izgarjan 2014: 23). Her name, which can be pronounced as "pilot", suggests that she is capable of navigating between African and African American cultures. She teaches Milkman how to fly by liberating him from the burden of shame he feels in connection to his name and his family. Ultimately, she teaches him the most valuable lesson that she learned from her father whom Solomon left behind: "You just can't fly on off and leave a body" (1978: 336). Following her father's dictum, Pilate has kept the bones of a white man she thought she killed with Macon until Milkman in turn liberates her by revealing that there was a mistake and that she had her father's bones with her all the time. However, Morrison

problematizes this transmission by making Milkman ultimately the one who holds the key to the secrets of the past and not Pilate who is its repository. Morrison does not show Milkman revealing to Pilate the puzzle of the Sugarman song. To the end, just like children in Shalimar, Pilate does not know the song refers to her grandfather.

Pilate and Milkman undertake a journey back to Virginia to bury her father's bones and while standing on Solomon's leap Pilate is shot by Guitar who wants to revenge himself on Milkman because he believes he cheated him out of the gold he was searching for. As he is crying over Pilate's dead body, a bird snatches a snuffbox in which Pilate carried a piece of paper on which her father wrote her name. Here again the archetype of bird is connected with freedom and transcendence from life into death. Milkman pays a tribute to her and realizes what it feels like to be abandoned, the way Ryna, Hagar and Solomon's children were abandoned. Pilate's last words "I wish I'd known more people. I would of loved 'em all. If I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more" (1978: 340) echo Smith's suicide note. Like his flight, hers also has mercy as its springboard. Milkman pays her the highest compliment when he says that "without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (1978: 340).

Still mourning Pilate, Milkman recklessly stands up knowing that Guitar's next bullet would not miss its target and leaps off the cliff:

As fleet and bright as a loadstar he wheeled towards Guitar and it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrender to the air, you could ride it. (1978: 341)

Milkman's flight thus remains as ambiguous as that of Smith and Solomon. It contains elements of suicide since he is overcome with grief over Pilate's death and knows that Guitar will kill him eventually. Additionally, with him, the lore of his family and community he so painstakingly recreated also dies since he does not have an heir who will continue the Dead family line and transmit the story of their great ancestor's flight. With Hagar's suicide, Pilate's branch of the family tree is extinguished as well. And yet, this flight contains elements of hope and belief as well. Smith and Milkman learn at the beginning of the novel that men cannot fly, but as Milkman acknowledges Pilate's and Shalimar/Solomon's ability to fly, it is clear that flying demands integrity and rootedness in tradition and community. Pilate's

flight is spiritual and does not have escape as its ultimate reason and destination. Milkman's flight incorporates all the elements of previous flights. Like Smith' and his slave ancestors' flights before him, his might end up in death and Morrison does not eschew this interpretation. But by leaving the novel with an open ending and by allowing Milkman to fly without the help of wings or airplanes, the way his ancestors did, she also allows the readers to choose whether they want to believe that flying is just an excuse for suicide, an illusion created by those left behind who need to console themselves or that there are men imbued with magical abilities to fly.

Milkman's flight also has Guitar's arms as its destination and Guitar honors his bravery laying his gun aside and reinventing his name Milkman Macon (conman) Dead by calling him "my main man" (1978: 341). Since Guitar in the novel stands for the wilderness, violence and desperation of the black ghetto, but also its music, humor and joy, by leaping towards him Milkman is not just honoring his ancestor Solomon and like Smith acknowledging and confirming ability of African men to fly, he is also honoring and finally joining both sides of his family - his father Macon and his aunt who belong to different points of spectrum of African American community (Izgarjan 2014: 32). Thus, in the end, the ability to fly is connected to mercy which consist of love for family and community Milkman professes when he calls Guitar his brother despite his murderous intentions. Most importantly, he surrenders disbelief, vanity and ego and this makes him fly.

Milkman's flight is not an escape but a celebration of his heritage and freedom he claims for himself and his community. He is capable of accepting paradoxes and surrendering to different interpretations of legends that make his heritage. This fluidity of identity and questioning of master narratives is inherent to magic realism. As King notices, "the ability to transcend the limits of master narrative is tied to the achievement of self-knowledge and the ability to locate value in Black experience." (2003: 123) Milkman's surrender speaks of liberation from restrictions in the form of racism, materialism and classism. The journey he makes compels the readers to question concepts of reality imposed by the dominant Western master narratives. Morrison's insistence on "authenticity of supernatural events [...] forces readers to suspend their disbelief and accept as fact that which the Western world, with its basis in empiricism and rationality, considers to be untrue." She promotes African American point of view and offers an alternative to Western individualistic ideologies by rewriting the typical heroic quest myth." (Mills 2003: 320-1) Morrison places African American lore on equal footing with the myths that are foundations

of Western thought (Icarus, Odysseus, Oedipus) undermining their dominance. Fusion of African American and Western myths and legends favors hybridity and cross-cultural context that is more open to blurring of categories of reality and fantasy.

### References

- Abed, Sally. 2011. "From Feet to Wings: The Importance of being bare-footed in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" *Utah Foreign Language Review* 21. <http://enubs.utah.edu/index.nhp/uflearticle/view/1179> (07.11.2016.)
- Bowers, Ann Maggie. 2004. *Magic(al) Realism*. New York: Rutledge.
- Baldick, Chris. 2015. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, Joseph. 2008. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Novato: New World Library.
- Carpentier Alejo. 1995. "On the Marvelous Real in America". In: Zamora, L. P. and W. Faris eds. *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke University Press: 85-86.
- Foreman, P. Gabrielle. 1995. "Past-on Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call." In: Zamora, L. P. and W. Faris eds. *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke University Press: 369-88.
- Hogue, W. Lawrence. 1996. *Race, Modernity, Postmodernity A Look at the History and the Literatures of People of Color since the 1960s*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Izgarjan, Aleksandra. 2014. "Shifting Identities in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*". In: Šesnić J. and S. Cvek eds. *Working Papers in American Studies*. Zagreb, HUAMS: 21-35.
- Jennings, La Vinia Delois. 2008. *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa*. New York: CUP. [http://books.google.com/books?i&r-aZ25R5Ua M8C8Lpg--\\_--PA118&47boobayalle,+booba+tambe](http://books.google.com/books?i&r-aZ25R5Ua M8C8Lpg--_--PA118&47boobayalle,+booba+tambe). (05. 05. 2015).
- Jung, Carl G. 1978. *Psychiatric Studies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- King, Lovalerie. 2003. "Flying Africans, Myth of." In: Beaulieu, E.A. ed. 2003. *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*. Westport: Greenwood Press: 122-124.



- Mikics, David. 1995. "Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History, and the Caribbean Writer." In: Zamora, L. P. and W. Faris eds. *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke University Press: 371-406.
- Mills, Fiona. 2003. "Song of Solomon (1997)." In: Beaulieu, E.A. ed. *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*. Westport: Greenwood Press: 315-321.
- Morrison, Toni. 1981. "City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction". In: Jaye M. C. and A. Chalmers Watts eds. *Literature and the Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press: 35-43.
- Morrison, Toni. 1978. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Signet.
- Morrison, Toni. 1983. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1): 1-34.
- Morrison, Toni. 1984. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." In Man Evans ed. *Black Woman Writers 1950-1980: A Critical Evaluation*. New York: Doubleday: 339-45.
- Said, Edward. 1977. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
- Stirling, John ed. *The Bible Authorized Version*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Quick, Catherine. 2003. "Greek Mythology, Use of." In: Beaulieu, E.A. ed. *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*. Westport: Greenwood Press: 148-150.
- Van Toll, Naomi. "The Fathers May Soar — Folklore and Blues in Song of Solomon." <http://spiny.com/naomi/thesis>. (20. 05. 2016).
- Walters, Wendy. 1997, "'One of Dese Mornings, Bright and Fair,/Take My Wings and Cleave De Air": The Legend of Flying Africans and Diasporic Consciousness." *MELUS* 22 (3): 3-31.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson and Wendy Faris. 1995. "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s. " In: Zamora, L. P. and W. Faris eds. *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*. Durham: Duke University Press: 1-15.

Aleksandra Izgarjan

LET KAO METAFORA U ROMANU TONI MORISON *SONG OF SOLOMON*

Rezime

Članak se bavi analizom metafore leta u romanu Toni Morison *Song of Solomon*. Autorka koristi legendu o afričkim robovima koji su mogli da lete kako bi naglasila dualnost metafore leta i njenu subverzivnu ulogu koja omogućava različite interpretacije. Kompleksnost metafore leta u romanu Toni Morison zahteva upotrebu nekoliko književno-teorijskih okvira tako da će se u članku koristiti okvir magijskog realizma, praksa marginalizacije i označavanja pripadnika manjinskih grupa kao Drugog onako kako se tom temom bavio Edvard Said u svom delu *Orijentalizam* i Jungov koncept arhetipa i putovanja mitskog heroja. Fokus članka je posebno na korišćenju magijskog realizma i spajanju master narativa zapadne civilizacije sa legendama koje potiču iz afroameričke zajednice kako bi se preispitao process konstrukcije istorije i zajednice. Morison u prvi plan stavlja univerzalnost leta kao jednog od ljudskih impulsa koji može da se nađe i u zapadnoj, afričkoj i afroameričkoj kulturi čime pruža validnost svojim likovima i njihovoj sposobnosti da lete.

*Ključne reči:* metafora, let, Morison, mit, istorija.