Song Of Solomon – What’s In A Name? Essay, Research Paper

Toni Morrison?s award-winning novel Song of Solomon is full of very interesting, deep symbolism. Macon Dead III, nicknamed ?Milkman,? is a very symbolic character throughout the novel. His character is not only symbolic, for so is his name. Also, Milkman?s paternal aunt, Pilate, has an extremely significant and symbolic role in the novel. To her father, she represents the child who killed her own mother and took away her father?s wife. Seeing that Pontius Pilate sentenced Jesus to death, the name Pilate seems to coincide with her father, Macon Dead?s, opinion. Ironically, though, Pilate is a good person and is murdered in the end, just as Jesus was by Pontius Pilate. Another important character in the novel who portrays a great deal of symbolism is Guitar, Milkman?s best friend. Guitar is named after something that he is ultimately unable to attain. ?I saw it when my mother took me downtown with her. I was just a baby?I cried for it, they said. And always asked about it.? This unreachable goal accurately describes his character throughout the novel. He is never able to overcome the obstacles that stand in his way or to reach the goals he has set for himself. Toni Morrison intelligently uses the characters Milkman, Pilate, and Guitar to successfully portray a great deal of symbolism throughout her novel.

?A milkman. That?s what you got here, Miss Rufie.? Milkman is given his name for a very logical reason: his mother nurses him until he is an adolescent. Freddie discovers this and gives Macon III his new nickname that will stick with him for the rest of his life. The name Milkman is symbolic in that it represents the other man in his mother, Ruth?s, life; it represents her need for another man because she simply cannot get what she feels she wants and needs from her husband. Consequently, she turns to her son to provide her with the comfort and love she is lacking.

Also, Milkman symbolizes his mother?s strong dependence on him. She does not feel needed by her husband or her other children, so she nurses her son for many years beyond infancy to feel that she is needed, as mother, by her son. The fact that she depends so heavily upon her son reveals the numerous insecurities she has about herself. It is the character and the name of Milkman Dead that enlighten readers of these highly significant facts and symbols throughout the novel.

Though Milkman is a very symbolic character in Song of Solomon, he is not the only one. Pilate also has both a very symbolic character and name. First of all, her name is derived from the biblical name of Pontius Pilate, the man who sentenced Jesus to death on the cross. This name is very symbolic of her father?s feelings toward her. Although her father does not purposely choose her name, considering he can?t read, it quickly comes to signify the fact that her father feels that Pilate killed her mother, seeing as that her mother died during childbirth. Ironically, however, Pilate is murdered at the end of the book when she and Milkman go to give her father a proper burial.

Pilate also represents a great deal more than a murderer. She has a large part of her mother?s spirit in her because although, physically, her mother dies while giving birth to her, part of her soul enters Pilate, so part of her literally lives in her daughter. Therefore, when Pilate is killed during the burial of her father, it shows that both she and her mother are tired of life, they have both lived it to the fullest, and they both want to rest in peace with Pilate?s father.

Finally, Guitar is also a very symbolic character in Toni Morrison?s novel. The symbolism behind his name is quite significant, and it accurately describes his personality. He is named after something he wanted very badly as a child: a guitar. The fact is that he could not have the guitar, though. Throughout his life, Guitar struggles to accomplish many ultimately unattainable goals. The goals he sets involve helping himself, though, and himself only. Those who get in his way are dealt with in different manners. At one point, Guitar even tries to take the life of his best friend, Milkman, who is initially drawn to Guitar because of his maturity. He makes Milkman feel older and more grown up. Also, Guitar is the only person who Milkman doesn?t mind being called his nickname by. He says that when Guitar says it, ?it sounded clever, grown up.? Because Guitar is never satisfied, he continues to do harmful things in hopes of fulfilling his goals. This causes him to murder Pilate, to ignore his best friend, and to eventually try to kill his best friend.

Indeed, Toni Morrison uses many symbols in the characters? names and personalities to accurately portray the many conflicts and strains between characters throughout the novel. She also uses these symbols to help depict the complex characters of Pilate Dead, Milkman Dead, and Guitar. These symbols also reveal the many weaknesses of each character. The combination of these elements brought together by Toni Morrison?s very unique writing style is what makes this novel such a distinguished work of American Literature.

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