

## THE PECULIARITIES OF FOLKLORE ELEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF TONI MORRISON

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**Abstract.** This article explores the unique incorporation of folklore elements in the literary works of Toni Morrison. Through a detailed analysis of her narratives, the study highlights how Morrison masterfully blends African American folklore with broader cultural and historical themes, creating a distinct narrative style that addresses issues of identity, culture, and memory. The findings underscore the significance of folklore in understanding the cultural and personal struggles depicted in Morrison's works, particularly in the context of African American history and experience.

**Keywords:** Toni Morrison, folklore, African American literature, identity, cultural heritage, Song of Solomon, narrative style, African heritage.

**Introduction.** Toni Morrison is celebrated for her profound ability to integrate African American folklore into her literary works. Her narratives often explore the depths of cultural identity, historical memory, and the African American experience. By weaving folklore into her storytelling, Morrison not only preserves traditional tales but also reinterprets them to address contemporary issues. This article aims to investigate the peculiarities of folklore elements in Morrison's works, examining how these elements contribute to the depth and richness of her storytelling.

**Findings.** In Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* (1977), folklore plays a crucial role in the narrative structure and thematic development. The story follows the protagonist, Milkman Dead, on a journey of self-discovery and cultural reconnection. Throughout the novel, Morrison incorporates African American folktales, songs, and oral traditions, which serve as a means for Milkman to connect with his ancestral heritage and understand his place in the world (Wilentz, 2016). The use of folklore in *Song of Solomon* is not merely decorative; it is integral to the protagonist's journey and the novel's exploration of identity and heritage.

In *Beloved* (1987), Morrison delves into the haunting legacy of slavery through the lens of folklore and supernatural elements. The novel is steeped in African American spiritual traditions and ghost stories, which Morrison uses to convey the lingering trauma and unresolved grief of the characters. The presence of the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter, Beloved, embodies the inescapable past and the way folklore can provide a means to address and process historical trauma (Khayati, 1999).

Morrison's narrative techniques are deeply enriched by her use of folklore, which she employs to create a multifaceted and immersive storytelling experience. One of the peculiarities of her approach is the seamless blending of myth and reality, allowing her to address complex themes such as memory, trauma, and identity in a nuanced manner. This blending creates a narrative space where folklore and historical reality inform and enrich each other (Furman, 2014).

In her portrayal of female characters, Morrison often draws on folklore to challenge traditional gender roles and present her female protagonists as resilient and resourceful individuals. The folklore elements in her works serve as a source of strength and empowerment for these characters, enabling them to navigate their cultural heritage and personal struggles (Higgins, 2014). For instance, in *Sula* (1973), the titular character embodies aspects of trickster figures from African American folklore, challenging societal norms and asserting her individuality.

Morrison's use of folklore is also characterized by its adaptability and evolution. She does not simply retell traditional stories; she reinterprets them to reflect the contemporary African American experience. This fluidity is evident in her novel *Jazz* (1992), where the rhythm and structure of the narrative mimic the improvisational style of jazz music, itself a form of cultural expression deeply rooted in African American folklore (Honsalies-Munis, 2020).

Moreover, Morrison's use of folklore serves as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. In the face of cultural assimilation and the erasure of African American history, her works act as a repository of traditional stories and practices. This act of preservation is particularly significant given the historical marginalization of African American voices. By embedding these stories within her narratives, Morrison ensures that they are not only remembered but also remain relevant and impactful for contemporary readers (Duvall, 2000).

## Conclusion

Toni Morrison's incorporation of folklore elements in her works is a testament to her skill as a storyteller and her deep engagement with cultural and personal identity. By weaving together African American folklore and broader cultural narratives, Morrison creates a unique literary form that speaks to the complexities of the African American experience. Her works not only preserve and reinterpret traditional stories but also offer new insights into the ways folklore can inform and enrich contemporary literature. Through her innovative use of folklore, Morrison addresses themes of identity, cultural conflict, and historical memory, making significant contributions to the understanding of African American history and culture.

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