

“Aesthetics of representation in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*”

Paul Kennedy Ndubuisi Enesha (PhD)
paulkensha@yahoo.com

Abstract

African American literature, through the aesthetics of representation, has consistently revealed and condemned racism against the African American population in the United States of America. This process of revelation and condemnation has also generated sustained critical attention aimed at assessing the effectiveness of such representations. The thrust of this study, therefore, is to appraise the patterns of representation adopted by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison in their respective novels: *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, *Invisible Man*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Beloved*. To achieve this objective effectively, the study adopts the neo-Marxist concept of the “mediated subject” in order to interpret and evaluate representations of character, action, voice, motivation, and thematic concerns within the confines of aesthetic sensibilities in literary art.

Key words: Representation, aesthetics, race, racism,

Introduction

The United State of America is a country generally addressed as an “immigrant country” or “nation of immigrants”. This is because of its multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial make up. However, the dominant ethnic group in the United States of America is the white Americans who for centuries have dominated the political and economic spheres of the country to the detriment of other racial groups. In the United States of America, the African-Americans are the most segregated and this racism against the blacks is traced to the trans-Atlantic slave trade of the 15th century. The effect of this singular inhuman activity continues to affect the dynamics of political, economic and social relationships between the whites and the blacks in the United State of America till this millennium.

It is against the above backdrop that many African-American writers wrote and have continue to write on the dynamics of segregation and racism against the African-Americans in the United States of America. The literary works of most African-Americans are relatively representations on the lives of the African-Americans under oppressive racial environment in the United States of America. Depending on the literary gift and temperament of the individual African-American authors, the aesthetics sensibilities or these representations come in different shades and degrees. In the works of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison, as listed above, representations of racism are revealing, shocking and sometimes overwhelming to a conscious reader who contemplates to be in the shoes of the African-Americans in the United States of America.

Aesthetics of Representation

The domain of aesthetics is large and extensive because it is multidisciplinary in nature and its effective appropriation must be narrowed down to the specific area of our concern as it relates to works of fiction. According to *Dictionary of World Literature*, “[a]esthetics, since Banmgarten's time, has been defined as the knowledge of the beautiful in nature and in art, of its character, or its condition and its conformity to law” (p. 3). Again, *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* defines aesthetic as a “set of principles on which an artist's work is based” (p. 25). The two definitions may seem simple but they provide basic meanings of aesthetics and more importantly as it relates to our concern in this work. Aesthetics as it relates to literature, has to do with form or manner of presentation. A work of art by nature presupposes beauty that enables it to entertain and sustain the audience's interest and illusions of reality or fidelity of art.

“Aesthetics,” according to Ross Murfin and Supryia Ray:

Is the study of beauty in nature and arts. Two divisions, or approaches, to aesthetics exist: [...]

Aesthetics is relevant to literary criticism insofar as it considers the relationship between beauty and other values, such as truth. The study of aesthetics also involves inquiry into the nature of artistic creation and audience appreciation, (p. 6).

In African-American literature, the debate on the aesthetic and utilitarian aspects of literature is a recurring one. This is perhaps because of the socio-economic and political climate that inform the creation of such art. The United States of America is a multicultural society, but there is little or no practical application of the dictates of multiculturalism as it concerns the African American people. The incidence of racism and subjugation against the African Americans have been for centuries without abating till this millennium. This movement has its members across many ethnic groupings including white people. This movement uses placards for demonstrations, shirts (with the inscription, “Black Lives Matter.

It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that writers of African American descent began to produce literary works that protest the racial injustice in the United States against the blacks. African-American writers began to respond by way of writing and galvanizing literary and political movements that propagate equal right for both blacks and whites in America. Traditions and movements like Black Power, Black Arts Movement, Black Aesthetics and Harlem Renaissance were all focused on espousing African-American rights and identity.

Given the above situation, African-American literature carries with it a high degree of protest and utilitarian sensibilities to the extent that some critics dubbed it propagandist and journalistic literature. Every literary work carries some degree of utilitarian sensibilities or moral voice and that of aesthetic canvass. However, the question of equality in the degree of the utilitarian and aesthetic latitude of each in a literary work has to be measured by socio-economic and political circumstances that motivated the author to write. In the domain of literature, the thematic vision and stylistic landscape usually blend to provide an enduring and timeless work, and literary critics judge authors on these two inseparable functions of literature.

According to Jennifer Burton and Louis Gates, "question whether art is by definition political, and if it is, whether overt propaganda or more nuanced artistic expression is more effective as a political tool" (p. lxxi). They opine that "[t]he debates first became prominent among leading artists and critics during the Harlem Renaissance" (p. lxxi). They further reveal that "[questions raised include whether the word, "propaganda" should be rejected or embraced; whether artistic freedom is desirable or even possible; and what type of art best fosters the advancement of civil rights" (p. lxxi). According to them, representation in art is derived from the claim that art is loaded with the political undertone of the society. This, they argue, is because art shapes people's view in the society. They further argue that African-American writers should use black characters who challenge the racial statuesque and essentialist culture of America (p. lxxi).

As M. H. Abrams and G. G. Harpham argue:

Any text is conceived as a discourse which, although it may seem to present, or reflect, an external reality, in fact consists of what are called representations - that is, verbal formations which are the "ideological products" or cultural constructs of the historical conditions specific to an era. Many historicists claim also that these cultural and ideological representations in texts serve mainly to reproduce, confirm, and propagate the complex power structures of domination and subordination which characterize a given society. (p. 219)

African-American literature, over centuries, has been seen as, or dubbed a propagandist literature because of its overt protest nature against the dialectics of racism in America especially if one appreciates the degree of racial injustice against the African-Americans, and again if we also appreciate the trite expression that literature does exist not in a vacuum. The form and content of African-American literature definitely have always reflected the thematic and contextual sensibilities against the backdrop of racial construct of the United States of America.

The term "Representation," as used in this work, is the pattern of portrait or portrayal of fact of life in a literary manner. Art and literature entail representation of human life for aesthetic and utilitarian aims. In view of the above explanation, aesthetics and representation, as used in this work, has to do with the exploration and evaluation of the literary tools both in content and form that the writers appropriated in their pattern of representation of the racial sensibilities against the African Americans in the United States of America.

Wright's *Native Son* is loaded with symbolic representation. For instance, the setting of *Native Son* corresponds to the sub division of the novel – Fear, Flight, and Fate. The three different locales of the novel are symbolically represented in the novel. Fear” is the black belt of Chicago where the poor African-Americans live. The area is largely and grossly slum and blacks are forced to live there by the fringes of the social, economic, and tenancy policies of the white landlords. The area is more or less hell on earth and breeds fear and insecurity among the black people.

The second part of the novel is set in the upper-class district that is exclusively reserved for the white people, and it is symbolically represented in the novel as “Flight.” The nature of the first setting and its effect in the mind of Bigger Thomas induced the fear which propelled the flight we witnessed in the second part of the novel when Thomas Bigger killed Mary Dalton.

The third part of the setting of the novel is the court room where the fate of Richard was finally “sealed, signed and delivered.” This part of the novel in which the fate of Richard was decided is represented in the novel symbolically as “Fate.” In the novel, Wright uses symbols that aptly illustrate the setting of his novel and to a reasonable extent the thematic sensibilities of his *Native Son*. The thematic sensibilities of *Native Son* is encapsulated in the literary principle of Naturalism and one of the fundamental touchstones of this principle is environmental determinism.

Wright's *Native Son* is remarkably a didactic piece that is rendered within the logic of cause and effect to drive home the sensibilities of moral posture of the author. It is not surprising that the author overtly appropriated logic because of the gross racial acts against the blacks in the United States of America. The plot structure of the novel is couched from ignorance to self-awareness and enlightenment.

The life of Bigger Thomas provides the irony which gave credence to Wright's argument on racism. For instance, Bigger, before his conviction, was never free.

Wright's *Black Boy* is an interesting and evocative autobiographical piece. Structurally, *Black Boy* is divided into three stages which reflect the settings of the novel. At the outset of the novel, the first stage represents Wright's childhood and adolescent age at Memphis, West Helena and Jackson. The second part of the novel captures his later adolescent life, while the third and last stage reflects his adult life in Chicago. These three different settings in the novel artistically reflect journey motifs. This motif, in turn is artistic and apt, revealing the protagonist's ordeal in his search for acceptance in the northern states of the United States of America. The life of the protagonist in the novel is captured as an unstable one at the spiritual, economic and physical levels. It is from the journey motif that the thematic sensibilities of the novel are built and sustained and vice versa. Richard kept moving in the novel in search of recognition, acceptance and identity because of the oppressive, deterministic environment or setting.

In the novel, Wright provides a kind of ironic thrust in his representation of racial argument. Due to the oppression and suppression the blacks suffer (as portrayed in the novel), in the hands of the white, the blacks develop a high degree of hatred and they are unable to rebel or act against the whites for fear of retribution. Most blacks remain incapacitated and docile in the face of physical, mental and psychological torture, occasioned by the imperatives of racism against them. Wright's use of this kind of irony is to illustrate how racism can cripple its victim and make it difficult, if not impossible to act. However, Wright provides an exception to that through the characterization of Richard who has both the disposition and resolve to live. Despite the harsh racial environment, he still insists on his right. Richard is presented in the novel as the symbol of black power and resistance against the sensibilities of racism.

Again, the novel is full of symbols and this device is appropriated to drive home the nexus between religion and racism. Religion is seen as a tool of racism. Richard's grandmother represents the oppressed that are trapped by religion and racism in America, the white employers symbolize racism in the United States of America. In *Black Boy*, white employees conspire to get Richard to fight Harrison to initiate violence and distrust among the blacks.

Racism nurtures the system of divide and rule among the victims. This is deliberately done to destroy any form of unity that may develop among the oppressed. Wright's representation of this situation is to validate his argument about the overwhelming and far-reaching mechanism and design of racism to destroy the blacks and their ability to have a common front in the fight against racism. The above induced intra-racial conflict is also illustrated in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, in *Battle Royal*.

These two novels portray the apprehension, the deprivation, the hunger and indeed the psychological and physical brutalities that African-Americans suffer under the white supremacist society of the United States of America. The utilitarian value of the two novels could be derived from their subtle admonitory message being that an evil society inevitably breeds violent individuals. This message is well illustrated through the naturalistic sensibility of environmental determinism used in the two novels. *Black Boy* and *Native Son* as well as Wright's other works are concerned with issues such as alienation, freedom, fear, racism and identity through violence arising from the theme of racism. Richard in *Black Boy* who laments thus:

Not only had the southern whites not known me, but more important still, as I had lived in the south I had not had the chance to learn who I was. The pressure of southern living kept me from being the kind of person that I might have been. I had been what my surroundings had demanded, what my family - conforming to the dictates of the whites above them- had exacted of me, and what the whites had said I must be (p. 227-228)

No doubt Wright object in *Native Son* and *Black Boy* and other of his works has been the representation of the racism in the United States of American. Remarkably, this remains part of our concern in this work. In our effort to effectively evaluate the above concern, recourse is made to the issue of content and form of the novels in this work.

For Caleb Corkery :

Looking into "the man" behind the writing readily reveals how self-conscious Wright was in his role as a writer. Philosophically, he believed that being black and a writer automatically put him into a representative role, proclaiming [t]he voice of the American Negro is rapidly becoming the most representative voice of America and of oppressed people anywhere in the world today (p. 4).

According to Corkery, Wright's strategy for initiating social and political change by representing black people, made the quality of his character central to his message. One who claims to be portraying *the* black American experience must satisfy the audience's expectations of a black spokesperson. This is how Wright enters onto the world stage, to forever change his life and how people viewed his life. The way he became constructed as a representative of black people advanced his message far beyond his expectations. The thematic canvass of almost Wright's novels vividly carved a niche for him as an acknowledged spokesperson of the black people in American society (p. 5).

Corkery also observes that " Seen as the product of a racist society and admired for his use of language to overcome his circumstance Richard Wright offered an emblem of racial struggle, an image that romantically conflated the man, his race, and his words. His victimized characters were part of him and he, the poignantly expressive author, was part of the Negro race" (p. 8-9). Corkery equally holds that "Wright's writing persona satisfied his audience's expectations of a black spokesperson because he shared many of their attitudes toward African Americans" (p. 9).

Ellison's *Invisible Man* is cast in fog and illusion that beclouds a black man from appreciation of his innate identity and the white people from the appreciation of the multicultural nature of American society. In so doing, internal clash of identity manifests and he is stuck between the two different identities. The novel's climax begins on the protagonist's realization of the real motivation of the Brotherhood, and that at every inch of the society, racism exists. The main point of climax occurs during his recluse in the underground or manhole where the narrator appreciates all the things that have made him to fail in his quest for better life in the racial environment. After this realization comes the disillusionment which provides his further realization that the real American identity must correspond with the dictates of multiculturalism, i.e., racial identity must come from within and outside his racial background to provide sustainable balance. This change made the narrator, i.e., the protagonist a better person.

It is instructive that it is in dark and recluse environment that the protagonist/narrator appreciates his invisibility and his identity in a racial environment, and he decides to write his story down. One of the major concerns of Ellison in his novel is to illustrate that in a racist environment, the victims are not given true identity and they remain invisible to themselves and to their world. Ellison's *Invisible Man* explores the problem associated with the comprehension of two identities of that African American person in the United States. The novel explores man's attempt to understand his society and himself. Ellison informs us that he has the responsibility of revealing the human universal hidden problem of blacks who are torn between two identities of being black under American society and at the same time convey his vision of the duo- black and white coexistence and fraternity. Ellison was correct especially if one examines thoroughly the subject and thematic concerns of his novel as well as his pattern of representation. The novel indeed, portrays the internal crises of the dual identity of the African American in a racial milieu – the hyphenated identity crises faced by African-Americans with a vision of the possibility of multicultural coexistence.

This is because the symbol of blindness and invisibility pervades every action and inaction of the main character in *Invisible Man*. Miralles further contends that the pattern of representation in Ellison's *Invisible Man* reflects the mood of people who are fighting against racial discrimination, same with Wright's *Native Son* (p. 60). The prejudice of racism could not allow the whites to appreciate the violation of human rights of the blacks in the staged Battle Royal. It blinded their conscience in censuring the deadly game masterminded by the whites to destroy love that exists between black people, and to humiliate them. Battle Royal as presented in the novel reveals the bestial nature of the participants as well as the organizers who are both blinded and unable to understand the useless and deadly nature of the game as portrayed in the novel. Indeed, the human value and sanctity of human life are hidden from the whites who are blinded by racial sensibilities to the extent they fail to recognize "the reality of black and white fraternity." Ellison's novel the *Invisible Man* provided the revelation that is needed in the understanding of the futility in racial segregation.

According to Irving Howe, Ellison has rich, native talent and vision, as a novelist. Howe sees Ellison as one who is abundantly endowed with wild inventions, hence his pattern of representation makes his portrayal to rise with tension that makes people bleed and make his language sing (p. 37). This is why he says that "no other writer has captured so much of the hidden gloom and surface gaiety of Negro life" (p. 37).

According to Jordan Alexandra Hill, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* has been long criticized for its overt, almost excessive symbolic elements. This charge is admittedly hard to deny: For racial symbolism, Ellison gives readers the image of a black man working for a company that makes America's whitest paint; for identity and alienation, the author uses motifs of "blindness" and "invisibility"; and for political struggle, rather than choosing subtle and suggestive situations, the protagonist is tossed into a Harlem race riot.

Invisible man in a symbolic manner calls on the white supremacists in America to remove the log in their eyes to enable them see and experience human value devoid of racial sensibilities.

Hill continues to aver thus: "Yet *Invisible Man*, winner of the National Book Award has aged well and is still celebrated by critics for its bold treatment of racial and political tensions. How, then, does Ellison pull it off?" In other words," he states, "what makes Ellison's imaginative construction so representative, so compelling?" Hill advises that "To answer this question requires an examination of the many symbols and motifs that bring Ellison's masterpiece to life, as well as the complicated subjects they are meant to represent. In the end, it becomes clear that Ellison's symbolic devises are what make his narrative so effective. *Invisible Man* is able to weave identity, race, and politics into a strikingly visual portrait that is neither realistic nor figurative, neither modern nor postmodern—but ultimately expressionistic."

Hill further argues that: "[t]he fact of the protagonist's invisibility—his waltz through a dark, dream-like world where people refuse to see him, and he, indeed, even refuses to see himself—is really the setting of the story.

Discussing the pattern of representation in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Reza Deedari and Faghih Nasiri opine that the entire story of the novel is rendered in a style characteristic of storytelling tradition of African Americans. In their view, Ellison adopted a narrative technique that enables the protagonist to fight white nihilism and accord value for the survival of the blacks who live a marginal and miserable life (p. 1708).

For William Lyne:

The main text of *Invisible Man* is what Joseph Frank calls "a negative Bildungsroman," wherein the narrator's every attempt at a dialogue with the society is crushed by exterior forces. Bledsoe, Broockaway, Jack, and Ras the Exhorter are real obstacles, treacherous foes who lead the invisible man down a series of blind alleys (p. 324).

Wright's *Native Son* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* provide pungently in an artistic way the gross negative effect of the racial injustice against the blacks in the United States of America. It is as a result of caustic racial situation that made Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* to kill, and in similar vein, it is the racial culture that contributed to the tragic life of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. The two novels are effective representations of what racism can do to its victim.

Nellie. Y. McKay appreciates the relevance of Morrison's *Beloved* in terms of its pattern of representation because, according to McKay, the novel evokes what Ann Snitow referred to as: "the terror of its material," as well as its spiritual richness; in the complexities of its layers of meaning embedded in meticulously crafted yet passionate prose; in the author's powers of imagination and mastery of language; and in its impact on readers" (p. 10).

Discussing Morrison's *Beloved*, McKay reveals that "It is also a text that is part of a larger project [of Morrison]," [...] to reclaim and re-create, the hitherto hidden lives of those who survived the ravages of the inhuman institution" (pp. 10-11).

Morrison's *Beloved* is meant to reclaim and recreate the hidden lives of those who suffered the ravages of inhuman institution in McKay's words. But beyond this, the novel is meant to validate this occurrence and its negative effects on the victims of this heinous crime. To amplify the above assertion, McKay further posits that Morrison's creative talent is more evident in her *Beloved* than any other of her novel because she explores and dramatizes phases in African-American history. Her representation is couched in the juxtaposition of the need to forget and remember, to reject and to reclaim. For McKay, Morrison recreates all that was absent in the slave narratives because her ghost story re-enacts and erects an enduring monument (p. 12).

Morrison's *Beloved* represents the crimes of slavery that keep recurring in human history and which cannot disappear until slavery and racism are totally abolished. The child ghost in the novel represents a shadow of racial vices that will continue to live with Americans until concerted effort is made toward human or racial integration for egalitarian society.

Amy Sickels asserts that *Beloved* "represents the ghost of Sethe's infant daughter, but she also represents the ghost of slavery" (p. 40). In analyzing the issue or subject matters which form part of the major concerns in *Beloved*, Sickels insightfully reveals thus: "*Beloved*'s epigraph states "Sixty Million and more," referring to the estimated number of slaves who died on the Middle Passage" (p. 41). Sickels further argues that "Morrison explores how slavery damages or prohibits a sense of self by depicting harrowing scenes in which slaves were treated as subhuman and traded as commodities" (p. 42). Sickels also avers that "The dehumanizing effects of the institution of slavery is presented as a foundation of the novel. Horrible memories of Middle Passage and other heinous racial crimes are revealed" (p. 42). The above view as expressed by Sickels parallels to a reasonable extent the literary principle of double consciousness as espoused by Du Bois. The effect of slavery on the African American community who are on the receiving end is unimaginable. As Sickels enunciates, in *Beloved*, "Morrison suggests that our nation's identity, like the novel's characters, must be healed; otherwise, the country suffers a loss of humanity and compassion" (p. 42).

On the pattern of representation, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia identifies the use of the omniscient narrator which she argues generates "narrative confusion and awkwardness," (p. 42). However, she is of the view that to abate the aforementioned confusion, the author included and omitted chapter headings (p. 40).

She strengthens her contention:

Chapters without headings are told by Claudia; those with headings are told by the omniscient narrator. However, this understanding of Morrison's narrative structure does not rid it of its awkwardness. On the contrary, the division of the story in such a way contributes to the reader's impression that Morrison, at this early stage in her writing career, must rely on artificial or external textural devices to organize her material. Just as there are organization weaknesses between chapters, so are there weaknesses within chapters. (p. 40)

The angle from which Morrison tells her story in *The Bluest Eye* is remarkable. Yet it adds to the complex nature of the narrative technique used in the novel. Morrison's use of Omniscient narrative method gives the narrator full and complete control through a vantage point in her exploration of the destructive effect of slavery on African Americans.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, as Mizuho Sakaguchi states, is narrated by a mechanism of double voice. These narrators give the story some level of credibility because the reader is presented with multiple perspectives that enables him or her appreciate the issues raised in the novel. From the view of a girl child Pecola and from the view of Claudia who assumes adult position in her rendition of the events in the novel. The pattern of representation Morrison adopts enables the reader to get objective assessment of what could not be revealed from the girl child perspective (p.37).

This is why Sakaguchi further avers that “[j]ust as the narrative has double-voice, so too do "colors" such as "blue" and "yellow" have double meaning. "Color" symbolizes African-American identity” (p. 40). Sakaguchi further enunciates that “[a]t the end of the novel, there is a split in the narrative voice. The double-voicedness in the narrative corresponds with the narrative structure of the novel” (p. 46). Sakaguchi proceeds to state that “[t]he double-voicedness in the narrative and structure of the novel reinforces the loss of African-American identity. The marigolds do not bloom” (p. 48).

The novel is cast to render and question the social construct of beauty, African American family life and sexuality. In the “novel”, the “protagonist”, i.e., Pecola strives for acceptance and existence within the narrow and ugly world which her community and environment provide for her. She is not accepted by the blacks as well as the whites. She is essentially voiceless in the novel and she is presented as not been able to understand the racial sensibilities of her environment hence her ignorant notion of beauty and her unsuccessful search for illusive and fake beauty as presented by the white racial construct. For the protagonist, her validity lies in her acquisition of beauty and possession of blue eyes. This propelled her search for blue eyes which was made unattainable by two major deterministic forces of her parents - Cholly and Pauline and the racial society of the United States of America. She finds no solace or protection in any from them but destruction. The hero of the novel is cast to live on the fringe, the stultifying neglect of her parents and the racial environment. The racial environment provided her with false identity and values that ascribed the possession of beauty as a validity of sensibilities of the white culture and citizenship. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that we have the representation of self loathing, self condemnation, rejection and depression. She is engulfed with false belief that possession of blue eyes will validate her life, make her beautiful and to be adored and accepted by both white and black communities.

Part of the heroine's destruction is the white supremacist construction of physical beauty and family and black community failures. The section of the novel that deals with Maureen Peal is an apt representation or recreation of the effect of racism within American society. Similarly, through Soaphead, the author reveals the condition that made Pecola imagine she had blue eyes. The author aptly and vividly characterizes Pecola as one with gross ambition of gaining the racial insignia or mark of whiteness, and blue eyes for her to be complete. Judging by her age, this can be seen as an innocent and ignorant wish, but the condition that motivated that kind of wish in the mind of an innocent child is overwhelming and beyond the rational capacity of the child and even an adult. In the novel, the author effectively represents the psychological mechanism of internalized racial sensibilities that negatively manifest in Pecola, Pauline, and Cholly. Their lives are plotted along tragic course that the racial society refused to redeem but instead aided in their destruction directly or indirectly.

Sakaguchi opines that:

Morrison manipulates three narrative voices: the voices of the omniscient narrator, Claudia as a child, and Claudia as an adult. At the end of the novel, by uniting the omniscient narrator's voice with the voice of Claudia as an adult, and extinguishing the voice of Claudia as a child, Morrison makes a gap between the unified voice and the nonexistent voice, and makes the reader conscious of significance of the lost voice of Claudia as a girl. (p. 46)

One of the greatest tragic effects of racism is self-condemnation. The black characters in *The Bluest Eye* are characterized as stereotyping themselves. They are realistically presented by the author as inferior to other white Americans. They act and behave in a way that suggests that the whites are better than the blacks in the areas of beauty, intelligence, and even in moral terms.

One of the narrative techniques employed by Morrison is what one can call illogical or disjointed narration. This kind of narration could be traced to the advocates of the modernist literary tradition who are of the view that some people do not think in a coherent way, and thereby go into what is known as stream of consciousness in literary tradition. In so doing, Morrison's emphasis is more on the representation content and not form. Yet the content gives meaning and relevance to the form.

Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, is set in the late 19th century, and precisely in 1873. The setting of the novel and the representation therein have important implication in the history of slavery in the United States of America. The author uses ample symbols to drive home her message. For instance, the appearance of the ghost child, Beloved, symbolizes Sethe's past. Despite all efforts to chase the ghost away, it continues to appear and to torment the mother who killed her to protect her from slavery. Beloved represents Sethe's daughter in all fronts hence her constant haunting of the house at 124 Bluestone Road of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Morrison also uses epigraphs in which she reveals the number of slaves killed from the time of the Middle Passage. She paints the picture of genocide against Africans and African American slaves. In the second epigraph, we have biblical references to the New Testament in a letter from St. Paul to the Romans.

Morrison uses omniscient narration point of view that enables her to pry into the inner recess of all the characters. She shifts and alternates from one character's thought to another. Again, the author used ample techniques of flashback. The large degree of the entire story of the novel is rendered through the literary mechanism of flashback event of several decades. The memories of past painful events of slavery and sufferings of slaves at the hands of the white slave master were rendered in bits by different characters, yet it aptly and pungently represents the destruction unleashed against the black people by the whites. The plot structure of the novel is never linear but complex, and this technique further symbolizes and illustrates the complex problem occasioned by slavery.

In the novels under study, the authors' (that is, Wright Ellison, and Morrison) patterns of representations of African family are relatively the same. In each of the novels, the woman plays a leading role in the family. For instance, in Wright's *Native Son*, and *Black Boy*, the mothers of the protagonists are at the center stage and male father relegated. The same applies to Morrison's *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* where the mother of the two protagonists are characterized prominently and brought to the forefront. It is only in Ellison's *Invisible Man* that there is little or no mention of the protagonist's mother rather his grandfather's influence is brought to the fore. This pattern of characterization and representation goes a long way to illustrate a conflict of two cultures. In Africa, we have a patriarchal cultural and economic sensibility as against what is obtainable in the western culture where women have equal rights with man and sometimes play a lead role. This characterization is a pattern of representation that gives credence to the principle of double consciousness.

As demonstrated in their respective novels in this work, their fictional representations reveal abundant ideological bent of double consciousness against the backdrop of the issue of race. Their artistic vision is to represent and reflect the society like a mirror so as to guide the entire American citizenry to the part of multiculturalism, egalitarianism, and multicultural co-existence.

Unacceptability and rejection are among the lots of the African-Americans in the United States and are portrayed in Wright's novels. In Wright's *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, the dominant pattern of representation of the issues of race and double consciousness is evidenced in his appropriation of autobiographical materials, journey motifs, bildungsroman, lamentation, vivid and shocking images of violence, Marxist aesthetics, adaptation and the literary principle of naturalism. All the above style and techniques are reflected in the events in the novel to foreground the effect of racism on the African-Americans in the United States in the United States.

For instance, Wright use of journey motif in *Black Boy* represented in Richard's age of innocence to adulthood and journey from one city to another in search of freedom and a better condition of life is revealing. Similarly, *Black Boy* is patterned in the literary technique of bildungsroman. This is because in the novel we have a detailed portrayal of the phases of Richard's age and educational development. A vivid picture of his childhood to adulthood development in the novel is created. Similarly, the protagonist's constant lamentation on this condition of life as an African-American is prominent. In *Native Son*, Bigger laments on the kind of life that is forced on him as a black man. The dominant literary philosophy in the two novels is naturalism and this justifies the argument that it is the racist American society that determines the kind of life African-American live.

Ellison's pattern of representation on the issues of racial double consciousness revolves around subject matters like; search for identity, invisibility, subterfuge and violence which are interconnected. The events or the story line of the novel is explored to reflect these issues. In Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the symbolic violence of blind folding of the negro boys in battle royal, the foreboding image of uncertainty in all the steps Invisible Man takes. The race riot, the existential voyage, the confusion and subterfuge all coalesce to orchestrate and sustain Ellison's appropriation of the principle of double consciousness. Every action or step protagonist of the novel takes in the novel no matter how risky and confusing are pattern on the technique bildungsroman and allegorical .quest for self discovery, self recovery and search for self identity under the racial milieu of United States

Morrison's pattern of representation of race and double consciousness in her *Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* built are upon the delusionary and meaning, essence and possession of beauty as well as the reconstruction of the distorted history of slavery of the African-American people of the United States. In her *Bluest Eye* the dominant pattern of representation is cast on the pattern of the Whiteman's, culture of the appreciation of beauty or human value based on the color of skin. Morrison was able to create this scenario effectively in the novel through the characterization of a child and this helps to illustrate the devastating nature of this dubious and erroneous values of beauty on the lives of African American people, young and old. Morrison in her *Beloved* re - tells and historicizes the physical, psychological and spiritual damage of slavery. Part of Morrison's aim in *Beloved* is to demonstrate that the memories of slavery can trigger double consciousness and this is aptly done through the ghost child Beloved who symbolizes the doable consciousness in the life of the mother Sethe. The point Morrison makes in her *Beloved* is that Slavery creates splits and fragmented personality and identity.

Conclusion

Wright, Ellison, and Morrison aptly represent issues of race and double consciousness in the novels selected for this study. Through their distinct patterns of representation, these authors demonstrate that the degree and nature of the negative consequences of racism, slavery, and dual identity experienced by African Americans in the United States are unbearable and worthy of strong condemnation. Consequently, through their novels, they fulfil their social responsibility as mediating subjects of their society by condemning racism in unequivocal terms. The issue of race has continued to dominate the literary landscape of African American literature for centuries. This situation has generated negative effects on individuals in particular and on society in general. One such negative effect, as postulated by W. E. B. Du Bois, is double consciousness. This concept is explored in detail in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. It is established that Wright, Ellison, and Morrison appropriate this principle in their exploration of race and in their examination of the effects of racism on African American people.

In addition, the study reveals both the aesthetic and utilitarian value of these novels, as they draw from the polemics of race, identity, and social injustice.

WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. *A glossary of literary terms*. (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning 2009.
- Aesthetics, N. *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners*. 2nd ed., p. 25. Oxford: A&C Black Publishers 2007.
- Burton, Jennifer, & Louis, Gates. H. Thematic introduction: The politics of difference, in J. Burton & H. L. Gates (Eds.), *Call and response: Key debates in African American studies* (pp. lv-lxxx). New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. 2011.
- Corkery, Caleb. Richard Wright and his white audience: How the author's persona gave *Native Son* historical significance. in A. M. Fraile-Marcos (Ed.), *Richard Wright's Native Son* (pp. 3-20). Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi 2007.
- Deedari, Raza, & Nasiri Faghih. Mahdis, The catastrophic effects of African Americans' marginalisation in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and August Wilson's *Fences*: A comparative study. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 9(11), 1702-1710. 2012.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. London: Penguin Books. 1965.
- Hill, Jeffrey A. *Symbols of Race, Identity, and Politics in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* 2015.
- Hooks, Bell. *Black looks: race and representation*. Boston: South End Press. 1992.
- Howe, Irving. Black boys and native Sons. In J. Hersey (Ed.), *Ralph Ellison: A collection of critical essays* (pp. 36-38). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1974.
- Lyne, William. The signifying modernist: Ralph Ellison and the limits of the double consciousness. *PMLA*, 107(2), 318-330. 1992.
- Mbalia, Doreatha Drummond *Toni Morrison's developing class consciousness*. Selinsgrove: Cranbury, NJ. Susquehanna University Press. 1991.
- McKay, Nellie. Y. Introduction. In N. Y. McKay and W. L. Andrews (Eds.), *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A casebook* (pp. 3-20). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 1999.
- Miralles. Alejandro Lopez Invisibility and blindness in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Wright's *Native Son*. *Philologica Urcitana*, 9(2013), 57-66.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1970.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York, NY: Alfred Knopf. 1970.
- Murfin, Ross, & Supryia Ray, M. (Eds.). *The Bedford glossary of critical and literary terms*. Boston. Bedford/St. Martin's. 2003.
- Sakaguchi, Mizuho. The Marigolds Do Not Bloom: Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. The University of Osaka. International Knowledge Archive 1996.
- Sickels, Amy. *African-American writers (Multicultural Voices)*. New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers. 2010.
- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers. 1940.
- Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers. 1945.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

Paul Kennedy Ndubuisi Enesha is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Imo State University, Owerri.