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# **European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies**

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A NEW WHITE AMERICAN IN THE AMERICAN LITERATURE THROUGH  
'PLAYING IN THE DARK: WHITENESS AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION'  
BY TONI MORRISON: A NEW CRITICISM READING**

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**Abstract:**

The melting-pot character of the American culture encloses and displays waves of thoughts, ideas, and beliefs among which are some subtle motivations for selective propaganda and indescribable underground literary orientations. The dynamic power in the American literary world inflicts a highly segregationist lead to inventing at a given time a new white American. In her fictional work '*Playing in the Dark*', Toni Morrison sheds new and personal light on American fiction and more particularly on the way through which the white man's identity has been formatted or shaped in the course of time with suspected negligence about Africanism. New criticism literary approach serves as a scientific panacea to decode and denote the ups and downs of that new drive of American literary history, in the shadows of blackness.

**Keywords:** culture, thoughts, fiction, white American, blackness

**1. Introduction**

Literature is man's exploration of man by artificial light, which is better than natural light because we can direct it where we want (David Daiches: 1955). From grass-root backgrounds as social, economic, or basically cultural in diversity, American literature has always been shaped through mixtures of ideals, thoughts, and beliefs. From the colonial period to the one of modernity after the enlightenment, American literature witnesses the case of the social reality of blackness and slavery which make a bed for a rich imaginative terrain on which white writers easily play with blackness as both 'not-free' and the 'not-me'. Mostly made for propaganda it has long been directed toward subjects that focus on issues related to white dominance in every

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field of discussion, supported by the effects of racial hierarchy which place blacks at bottom of the ladder.

Highly determined in the promotion of human values as the case of blacks is regarded in the whole history of the United States of America and mainly in the field of literature as part and parcel of its making, Toni Morrison deciphers about the operations of whiteness and blackness in the American literature. In her novel '*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*' she points especially to the politics of cultural workings of color and the Africanist presence in American literature. With her metacritical approach, she examines both longstanding and contemporary practice in literary criticism in the United States of America and significant endeavors to demonstrate how those practices shed light on certain aspects of the literature while fending off the Africanist presence. Through the lenses of national identity struggles, endeavors to shape an American literature with socio-cultural challenges, the American dream hit the bloc of the quest for human dignity in a context of highly motivated divergences and recorded pitfalls. The invention of race and whiteness leave indelible marks on the American literary imagination with biased orientation and preference.

## **2. American Social Character: Socio-cultural Considerations and Research-based Literary Backgrounds**

### **2.1 Insight into Some Basic Socio-cultural Considerations**

In limelight, by American social character, one essentially means to highlight those traits of individual personality and attitudes the population shows more frequently or in different ways than other compared populations do. For, it likewise contains the pursuit of individual distinctiveness and at the same time, a compensating search for a community united by social contracts within the context of the continual ingathering of the multiple diversity of peoples and races. The later ones being driven and drawn by religious, political, and economic forces typify the American experience in a way of the perpetual process of constant uprooting transplantation, renewal and formatting about the composition of "*a new race of men*". Describing the highly paradoxical character of the American socio-cultural paradigms, Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur forwards the following in his '*Letters from an American Farmer*' (1782).

*"What is then the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendent of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grand-father was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labour and prosperity will one day cause great changes in the world."*

The presence of unifying frameworks of thoughts, ideas, and socio-cultural values had inevitably provoked distinctive American peoples with social clashes where the survival of the fittest, dominantly reigned to impose fundamental mainstream rules on the little ones: the American literature at stakes. Approaching the notion of American social character leads straight away to grasp its equally characteristic opposite whereby objects of focus are mostly determined by whites' leaders. Erick H. Erickson, the author of '*Childhood and Society*' and defender of psychoanalytic theory, clearly elucidates the American character in a way that makes no confusion about the uprooting, transplanting, and reformatting of cultures and peoples in the making of America:

*"It is commonplace to state that whatever one may come to consider a truly American trait can be shown to have its equally characteristic opposition. This one suspect, is true of all "national characters", or (as I would prefer to call them) national identities – so true, in fact, that one may begin rather end with the propositions that a nation's identity is derived from the ways in which history has, as it were, counterpointed certain opposite personalities, the way in which it lifts this counterpoint to a unique style of civilization, or lets it dis-integrate into mere contradiction."*

The socio-cultural melting-up specificities of the immense differences between individual Americans as they were millions of them, North and South, East and West, of both sexes of all ages, and various races, professions, and religions; impact seriously the pluralistic emergence of the American culture and likewise the American literature which inevitably stems from lifestyles. The counterpointed fashions or intrinsic features as for the national identities, shaped in many ways, all the ingathered individuals and societies into one vortex: that widely animated cultural vessel of dynamic polarities. Such a deplorable priority biased the minority cases of cultural promotion within the American 'salad bowl', to the detriment of the fittest: the European culture with its unsound hierarchical order, illegitimately imposed, wittily promoted via an unsuspected propaganda: the invention of a new white American.

In fact, in the absence of a truly characterized national tradition, Americans have indeed been united, it might be agreed, by their commitment to the future despite dissensions of all kinds. In such a perspective, ethnic groups from diverse cultural backgrounds have developed the most notable American traits: idealism, flexibility, and adaptability to change; a tendency to conform to peers and neighbors, and not sticking to ancestral ways. Being a social process, migration colors the American socio-cultural experience with plausible attributes with impacts on the essence of American varieties of literature. Historian John Higham profusely illustrates the case on page 5 of his book, "*Send These To Me: Immigrants in Urban America*", in the following terms:

*“By visualizing the immigrant as the representative American, we may see him building America; we cannot see him changing it; whatever significance immigration may have in some inclusive or representative way, it has also been a major differentiating force. It has separated those who bear the marks of foreign origin or inheritance from others who do not. The importance of immigration in this more limited sense – as a source of distinctions, divisions, and changes within the United States – remains as yet only dimly grasped. We shall have to disentangle the special effects of immigration from the encompassing legend, and that will require all the right comparative history can shed.”*

In light of the above illustrative assertion, the American language could be seen as continually identifying new positions with the country they entered rather than the one they had left. Thus, the term immigrant presupposed the existence of a receiving society to which the alien could attach himself. The immigrant is not a simple settler or colonist who creates a new society and lays down the terms of admission for others, coming from somewhere else. He is indeed the bearer of a foreign culture that may help in one way or the other build the new nation in fields beyond expectations. The transported or transplanted foreign cultures in the New World did participate in the linguistic making of the nation. Yet, the harsh fight for social status for men and women, coupled with the triumph of the 'survival of the fittest', jeopardize the promotion of languages from minority groups. The pluralistic dominance of whites over any other socio-cultural groups in the United States of America witnessed at a given time, quite a special case of literature being oriented toward an invention of a new kind of white American.

## **1.2 Research-based Literary Backgrounds**

There are indeed some fundamental pillars or motivations that gear Toni Morrison to set interests in metacritical explorations with literary criticism since the cultural workings of color at the event of whiteness as a social invention. In May 1992 wittily lays emphasis on the operations of whiteness and blackness in the literature of white writers in the United States of America. In her genuine literary investigation, she strongly takes the position that existing literary criticism has provided incomplete readings of its canonical literature and has likewise concealed the politics informing the practice of critical literary and cultural analysis. Furthermore, her metacritical approach leads her in *'Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary Imagination'* to point to the politics of the universal which refers to whiteness as normative, unbiased, undifferentiated, always legitimate, and thereby transcendent a timeless. Within the framework of this approach, she lenses both longstanding and contemporary practices in literary criticism in the United States of America and endeavours in order to demonstrate how those practices highlight certain aspects of the literature while calling for vacuum, the 'Africanist Presence' as the issue of race is regarded.

Focusing on the fiction under study *'Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination'*, while enlarging the scope of her critical commitment, Toni Morrison extends her critical imagination on the meaning of the presence of the black body and of blackness in the literature of four white writers. Namely, we can provide details as follows: Willa Cather's

'*Saphira and the Slave Girl*' (1940), Edgar Allen Poe's '*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*' (1838), Mark Twain's "*Huckleberry Finn*" (1885) and Ernest Hemingway's '*To Have and Have Not*' (1937) and '*The Garden of Eden*' (1986). Throughout these narratives, the author criticizes a metaphysics of color that she simply locates in the above-mentioned writers' productions and likewise in the literary pitfall of the United States of America which has traditionally been apprehended as raceless and apolitical. Firstly, the author affirms that attempts by critics to remove politics and race from intellectual and artistic discussions have immediately cost literature its energy and life, and secondly, such attempts to remove these crucial issues from intellectual criticism are undoubtedly racist and political. For, in the course of this fiction, plenty of arguments are exposed and tackled still in the scientific approach of Toni Morrison within the angle of inventing a new white American in the literature of the United States of America.

## **2. Methodology, Literary Theory, and Working Definitions of Literature**

### **2.1 Methodology of Research and Literary Theory**

Fully aware of the fact that Toni Morrison digs out from American socio-cultural and political realities and knowing that race and the invention of whiteness as social constructs, the very first step to take has been to inquire about who is an American. The next step comes up with grasping insights into the American character, a character defined according to the American Heritage Dictionary as the combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another. It is elsewhere viewed as the combined moral or ethical structure of a person or group. With a focus on some writers' works on the meaning of Toni Morrison's metacritical approach to the cultural workings of color coupled with motives that could lead to the construction of a new white American in American literature. Equipped with these basic notions, the purpose set which needs to be developed in '*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*' by Toni Morrison appears crystal clear and the fictional work organization in terms of chapters and their contents is plainly assessed for fuller comprehension. Such appraisals of notions developed in each chapter help to apprehend insights around the construction of a new white American in American literature as depicted by the author and constitutes a gem in the organization of this research work.

Being a theory in the American context of the 1920s which sets itself apart from ordinary social interpretation of texts, New Criticism is identified as quite appropriate to help carry out this research paper in line with the purpose ahead to fulfill. It rightly indicates that a text as a closed entity is quite independent of meanings that can be produced from the background information of society. This precise aspect matches very well with the endeavors of the author to prove some almost hidden realities related to American literature. Halliday, a well-known linguist and renowned scholar about text and context says:

*"The terms, Context, and Text, put together like this, serve as a reminder that these are aspects of the same process. There is text and there is another text that accompanies it: text that is 'with', namely the con-text. This notion of what is 'with the text, however, goes beyond what is said and written: it includes other non-verbal goings-on – the total environment in which a text unfolds. So, it serves to make a bridge between the text and the situation in which texts actually occur."*  
(Halliday, 1991)

Selectively, New Criticism logically intends to offer not only new ways of reading but also a model reading forgetting the liable changes in values and outlooks. Toni Morrison sticks in fact to the main about digging out from the American socio-cultural and political backgrounds. Texts and contexts highly matter within of this research work where Toni Morrison exposes insightful information about the social reality of blackness and slavery regarding the making of American literature.

## **2.2 Working Definitions of Literature as Linked to Metacritical Exploration of the American Literature**

The literally fictional production '*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*' by Toni Morrison under study in this research work, tackles an unsuspected issue that rings the bell of secrecy or disclosing in the open air a particular drive of thought genuinely hidden in the American literature. Yet, it draws inspiration from the American socio-cultural and even political life experiences along with time through the well-known racial clusters throughout generations of Americans with limitless consequences. The new white American in question in '*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*' definitely refers to some realities about working definitions of literature which in fact provide more light on ways and means Toni Morrison considers and uses for the benefit of her fiction's messages to get home with readers.

Basically, literature is any oral or written expression of human thoughts, ideals, and beliefs in an aesthetic way; the artistic exploration of language, the articulation of ideas in songs, folklores, speeches, newspapers, poems, plays, short stories, memoirs, or autobiographies. Let's consider the following definitions from some renowned writers:

*"Fiction enables us to explore the recesses of man's head and heart with a torch; history allows us only the natural light of day, which does not usually shine into such places. Literature is man's exploration of man by artificial light, which is better than natural light because we can direct it where we want (David Daiches ...)"*

*"Literature is a collection of writings on any given subject or field of endeavor. Research workers and scholars often talk of "literature review". These people use the term to refer to their comments on what has already been written by other people in a given area of study. A literature review may help a researcher modify certain ideas on a topic. As an important prewriting procedure, literature review opens new horizons of thought and analysis for the writer. The idea of literature review*

*shows that every subject may have a corpus of literature."* (*The Guardian*, the May 5, 1986 issue, p.11 in an article titled 'What is literature?')

Kindersley (2000:397) deciphers that literature is writing that carries strong and lasting value through offering the reader important insights into the nature of human emotions and Aldous Huxley (1987:272), an English novelist and literary critic advocates that every man who knows how to read has it in his power to magnify himself, to multiply the ways in which he exists, to make his life full, significant, and interesting. '*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*' by Toni Morrison holds the right end of the stick about the intrinsic values or knowledge hidden in the above-mentioned types of literature definitions. The author has abundantly focused on such culture-based notions in delivering her message by means of her fictional production under study in this research work.

### 3. National Identity and the Shaping of a Typical American Literature

#### 3.1 Blackness, Americanness, and the Africanist Presence in the American Literature

When the old world met the new one which was made of peoples from diverse origins, great hopes for a better life and subsequent liberty hit the bloc of the unexpectedly grounded realities related to high divergences or dichotomies that prevailed over the relationships linking those peoples. Interests or objectives that enticed them to the promised land hardly meet. Power, authority and other socio-cultural considerations top over the basic or primary concerns. Since there is no literature without cultural or civilization-based realities, the black presence, Africanism, or what could be called American Africanism consciously or unconsciously help revamp or rejuvenate American literature under some special pretenses. The formative years of American literature take roots in those clusters of complex and contradictory situations in which American writers found themselves. Depicting the confusion plainly noticeable early in the making of the nation in all regards, Toni Morrison Deciphers the case in the following assertions:

*"Young America distinguished itself by, and understood itself to be, pressing toward a future of freedom, a kind of human dignity believed unprecedented in the world. A whole tradition of "universal" yearnings collapsed into that well-fondled phrase, "the American Dream". Although this immigrant dream deserves the exhaustive scrutiny it has received in ... to know what these people were rushing from as it is to know what they were hastening to. If the New World fed dreams, what was the Old World reality that whetted the appetite for them? And how did that reality caress and grip the shaping of a new one?"* (*Playing in the Dark*, p. 34)

*"Whatever the reasons, the attraction was of the "clean slate" variety, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only to be born again but to be born again in new clothes, as it were. The new setting would provide new raiments of self. This second could even benefit from the mistakes of the first. In the New World there was the vision of a limitless future, made more gleaming by the constraint, dissatisfaction, and turmoil left behind.....the desire for freedom is preceded by*

*oppression.... a yearning for God's law is born of the detestation of human license and corruption, the glance of riches is in thrall to poverty, hunger and debt."* (*Playing in the Dark*, p35)

Fully aware of compromise chances for cultural representations in shaping the American literature and with regards to challenges concerning objects of debate or discussion, it appears quite noticeable to affirm that black presence pervades the American nation and it is essentially crucial to shaping its national identity as well as developing the nation's literature. The presence of blacks and their sense of Africanism could be considered as the very fields on which and quite often against which characteristics like individualism, morality, innocence, and selfish interests are typically associated with American literature as well as the construction of Americanness itself. Claws of conflicts about literary appreciations regarding socio-cultural values in presence teach more than lessons to researchers meant to investigate how American literature comes up with new visions especially based on racial prejudices. Basic elements or considerations which intrinsically format the main about the oral or written expression of American thoughts or beliefs at early stages of the nation's making about literary production. The author elucidates the case as follows:

*"The body of literature produced by the young nation is one way inscribed in transactions with these fears, forces, and hopes. And it is difficult to read the literature of young America without being struck by how antithetical it is to our modern rendition of the American Dream. How pronounced in it is the absence of that term's elusive mixture of hope, realism, materialism, and promise. For a people who made much of their "newness" – their potential, freedom, and innocence – it is striking how dour, how troubled, how frightened and haunted our early and founding literature truly is."* (*Playing in the Dark*, pp35-36)

One could logically wonder why a young country that has been deeply "*repelled by Europe's moral and social disorder, swooning in a fit of desire and rejection, devote its talents to reproducing in its own literature the typology of diabolism it wanted to leave behind*" (*Playing in the Dark*, pp. 34). Furthermore, it could be assumed that such a drive of conduct leads in one way to benefit from the lessons of earlier mistakes and past misfortune and in the second to prevent their repetition through exposure and inoculation. Yet, emphasis may be shifted off the discussion about race from the impacts on those who suffer as a result of racialized narratives, literary, social, cultural, or political to the one on the impacts of racialism on those who sufficiently gain privilege and power under implicit as well as explicit discourses. The black presence definitely influences in one way or the other, the rationale about the American literature being forged by Americans themselves but still with claws about racial dissensions with limitless drawbacks. From Willa Cather's '*Sapphira and the Slave Girl*' identifies a real case example quoted by Toni Morrison to refer to the intersections of power, race, sex, and gender; as Willa Cather depicts the actions of a white woman who knowingly the black female body in order to gain both power and a sense of identity.

### 3.2 About the Quest for Human Dignity in the Yoke of the American Dream

Within the everlasting duality between the affirmation of human dignity and the ups and downs about the full implementation of the American dream in such contexts of socio-cultural and political upheavals, the forging of American literature meets a certain number of obstacles. The black presence represents more than a case of study to American writers mostly in the time of the construction of quite a new white American in the concert the American literary history. Toni Morrison discusses Edgar Alan Poe and Mark Twain regarding the Africanist presence in the American literature building-up or formatting. In limelight, some special points about grass-root considerations concerning specific insights that highly matter in grasping fuller comprehension of the concept of Africanism are presented by Toni Morrison in her fictional work as follows:

*“Earlier I said that cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation’s literature, and that what seemed to be on the “mind” of the literature of the United States was the self-conscious but highly problematic construction of the American as a new white man. Emerson’s call for that new man in “The American Character Scholar” indicates the deliberateness of the construction, the conscious necessity for establishing difference. But the writers who responded to this call, accepting or rejecting it, did not look solely to Europe to establish a reference for difference. There was a very theatrical difference underfoot. Writers were able to celebrate or deplore an identity already existing or rapidly taking a form that was elaborated through racial difference. That difference provided a huge payout of sign, symbol, and agency in the process of organizing, separating, and consolidating identity along culturally valuable lines of interest.” (Playing in the Dark, p39)*

Interests predominantly influence in many regards any social, economic, and even political endeavors with Americans and mainly about national issues which in fact consciously or unconsciously call for racial disparities. Some early writers as pioneers like Edgar Alan Poe and Mark Twain instill some fundamentals about Africanism and the Africanist presence in American literary history. Morrison apprehends Edgar Alan Poe as an early writer whose positions or figurations of an Africanist presence in the literature of the United States of America is like a gem or commonly agreed upon as central to our understanding of the concept of Africanism. A concept that logically locates the literature in dread, fear, and haunting rather than in the later prevailing social narrative of the United States of America that is directed towards optimism, confidence, and newness. Still, Toni Morrison deciphers Mark Twain’s ‘Huckleberry Finn’ as an intelligible critique of the racist and classist pretensions of the antebellum United States of America and as a tangible book in which an Africanist presence is central as a gem or cornerstone. A close analysis of the character Jim leads to confirm that Morrison’s critique bears on Huckleberry’s, meaning Mark Twain’s inability to figure freedom for Jim since freedom in America implies without no doubt inequality. The author reading Twain’s satirical book, finds that freedom from slavery for the black body needs to be accompanied by an acceptance of inferiority. Enlarging the scope of understanding about the

concept of the American Dream, Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur stipulates the following in his *Letters from an American Farmer*:

*"The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions... Here, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and property will one day cause great changes in the world ..... An [immigrant] when the first arrives ..... no sooner breathes our air than he forms new schemes and embarks in designs he never would have thought of in his own country ...He begins to feel the effects of a sort of resurrection; hitherto he had lived but simply vegetated; he now feels himself a man ....; Judge what an alternation there must arise in the mind and thoughts of this man .... His heart involuntarily swells and glows; this swell inspires him with those new thoughts which constitute an American."* (M.G.J de Crèvecoeur).

From the content of this meaningful assertion, Toni Morrison inquires and discusses how founding writers of young America engage, imagine, imply, and create an Africanist presence and persona. Furthermore, she is interested in what ways these strategies explicate a vital part of American literature and how excavating these pathways lead to fresh and more profound analyses of what they contain and how they contain it.

Within the framework of her metacritical explorations, she envisages four stages for critical investigation: first, *"the Africanist character as surrogate and enabler. In what ways does the imaginative encounter with Africanism enable white writers to think about themselves? What are the dynamics of Africanism's self-reflexive properties?"* (*Playing in the Dark*, p51)

In the second stage, she tackles *"the way an African idiom is used to establish difference or, in a latter period, to signal modernity. We need to explicate the ways in which specific themes, fears, forms of consciousness, and class relationships are embedded in the use of Africanist idiom: how the dialogue of black characters is constructed as an alien, estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spellings contrived to disfamiliarize it."* (*Playing in the Dark*, p52)

Thirdly, *"a specific focus is placed on studies of the technical ways in which an Africanist character is used to limn out and enforce the invention and implications of whiteness. We need studies that analyze the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters. Such studies will reveal the process of establishing others in order to know them, to display knowledge of the other so as to ease and to order external and internal chaos."* (*Playing in the Dark*, p52)

Finally, *"she insists on the need to analyze the manipulation of the Africanist narrative (that is, the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and / or rejected) as a means of meditation – both safe and risky – on one's own humanity."* (*Playing in the Dark*, p53)

Fulfilling the American dream with full regard to human dignity within the American socio-cultural context where race undoubtedly defines much of literary fundamentals, crashes, dichotomies, and even unsound arguments reign as pitfalls to typical American literature. From the European cultural and civilization hierarchies which classify blacks and all related backgrounds at the very bottom of the ladder and the importance of the other ones in the

construction of American literature, intellectual appreciations nourish to a high extent definitions that could be attached to the American literature.

Picturing how impactful race has been in specifying Americans via the issue of whiteness and the mirror in which Americanization in the case of literary construction is regarded, the American lawyer and civil right leader Roger Wilkins highlights the following in the journal *The Boston Globe* in 1976: "Devastating ... we are left with the crushing effect of what we have done to ourselves by using race as our defining tool and lying most of the time about what we are doing.... Impressive." The concept of a new white American leads us to suspect whether there was an old image that, in process of time fades, fails to reach a target and needs to be fully reshuffled for specific objectives, not for a common purpose but instead for socio-cultural cleavage for the sake of 'White Americans'.

#### **4. Between the Concepts of 'American Self' and 'Africanism': The American identity at Stakes**

Still, with the same approach of metacritical explorations into the operations of whiteness and blackness in the literature of white writers in the United States of America, Toni Morrison once more refers to some literary productions to display important elements for literary appreciation. Edgard Allan Poe, Williams Faulker, Saul Bellow, and Ernest Hemingway sufficiently provide issues for discussion and elements of appreciation regarding American literature and mainly about the amazing invention of a new American in the American literature for propaganda but with grass-root considerations. From one writer to another one, both concepts are thrashed out through images and symbols with a final point about a kind of correlation, witty dominance, and supremacy.

With Edgard Allan Poe in his works quite forty years earlier Toni Morrison points to how the concept of the 'American self' was similarly bound to Africanism and was by the same token similarly covert about its dependency. Here are some implicit details the author exhibits about the above-mentioned duality:

*"We can see to "The Gold-Bug" and "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (as well a Pym) for samples of the desperate need of this writer with pretensions to the planter class for the literary techniques of "othering" so common to American literature: estranging language, metaphoric condensation, fetishizing strategies, the economy of stereotype, allegorical foreclosure, strategies employed to secure his characters (and his readers') identity. But there are unmanageable slips. The black slave Jupiter is said to whip his master in "The Gold-Bug"; the black servant. Pompey stands mute and judgmental at the antics of his mistress in "A Blackwood Article". And Pym engages in cannibalism before he meets the black savages; when he escapes from them and witnesses the death of a black man, he drifts toward the silence of an impenetrable, inarticulate whiteness."* (Playing in the Dark, p58)

The existence or effectiveness of an 'American self' couldn't be real regarding no interconnectedness with 'othering' since Americans are by nature products of a mixture of

cultures with manifest identities on American soil. Since Edgard Allan Poe's works elucidate the concept of American Africanism already earlier in his work entitled *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* where he genuinely describes the last two days of an extraordinary journey as follows:

*"March 21<sup>st</sup> - A sullen darkness now hovered above us – but from out the milky depths of the ocean a luminous glare arose, and stole up along the bulwarks of the boat. We were nearly overwhelmed by the white ashy shower which settled upon us and upon the canoe, but into the water as it fell ..."*

*"Marsh 22<sup>nd</sup> – The darkness had materially increased, relieved only the glare of the water thrown back from the white curtain before us. Many gigantic and pallidly white birds flew continuously now from beyond the veil, and their scream was the eternal .... and now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the rule of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow." (Playing in the Dark, pp31-32)*

Naturally, God-made dualisms or dualities help compare one thing with another one and it would be safe to affirm that there is no particular identity without any other one to mirror oneself in or consider it as a reference model whereby others could derive. To remind of other images into the forbidden space of blackness as the case of American literary history openly reveals it, Toni Morrison stresses the work *'Absalom'* (1936) of Williams Faulker an American writer who particularly is interested in the causes and effects of extreme psychological pressures. She pictures the scene in this sense: Does Faulker's *Absalom! Absalom!* after its protracted search for the telling African blood, leave us with just such an image of snow and the eradication of race? Not quite. Shreve sees himself as the inheritor of the blood of African kings; the snow apparently is the wasteland of unmeaning, unfathomable whiteness. More intrinsically, Toni Morrison stresses the complex figurative image projected to readers' eyes by the means of particular circumstances where contexts are created to serve the cause of literary imagination. Here comes her own appreciation of the fact in *'Henderson the Rain King'* by Saul Bellow:

*"In Henderson the Rain King Saul Bellow ends the hero's journey to and from his fantastic Africa on the ice, the white frozen wastes. With an Africanist child in his arms, the soul of the Black King in his baggage, Henderson dances, he shouts, over the frozen whiteness, a new white man in a new found land: "leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence" (Playing in the Dark, p 58)*

Race as metaphor and even metaphysics implicitly defines much of American literature because it appears more expanded in every aspect of Americans' life while provoking class conflicts and social schisms. The later ones nourish nothing else than disgraces that favor the literary imagination in question and its related target to be reached for white American praise.

In Ernest Hemingway's 'To Have and To Have Not' and 'The Garden of Eden', Toni Morrison sees the opportunity to discuss a writer whose use of the black body in literature is 'unselfconscious'. In Morrison's eyes, there are two prevalent uses of an Africanist presence in Hemingway's narratives. The first one is a black character that holds the heroic figure's suppositions of strength and power which then produces fear and dread of the loss of power or the truth of importance. The second stands as a black character who takes the role of the nurse, played by an accommodating and self-effacing woman. In one way or the other, illustrative cases are multiple in demonstrating the ups and downs or hidden faces of whiteness and the literary imagination in the United States of America with Toni Morrison in her own style of metacritical exploration of American literature.

## 5. Conclusion

From colonial literature to modern one, the American literary imagination went through particular endeavors in terms of waves of thoughts, ideas, and beliefs. It has specifically got inspirations by grounded realities with drives of dynamic theories whether social, economic, cultural, religious, and political. Social constructs like the issues of race, whiteness and recorded fallouts lend other kinds of attributes or colors to the American literature through the operations of blackness and whiteness. One could logically foresee witnessing such a case of amazing literary imagination which consciously makes room for a typical framework of dichotomy when a nation happens to make a place for slavery by developing a hierarchy of race and at the same time that it promotes its theory of natural rights while in effect excluding black people from the rights of man.

Africanism in the literature of the United States of America reveals insights about the self-reflexive nature of some encounters as dealt with by authors like Edgard Allan Poe, Williams Faulker, Saul Bellow, and Ernest Hemingway whose works not only inspire Toni Morrison but largely influence and motivate and even guide her exhilarating fiction 'Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary Imagination'. The social reality of blackness and slavery in the United States of America offers quite a highly rich imaginative field on which most white writers easily play with blackness as both the 'not-free' and the 'not-me'. Under false and selfish pretenses of shapes and dimensions about Africanism in the eyes of white American writers, it falls clear that images of blackness can be fearful and desirable, veil and protective, rebellious and forgiving: all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Yet, writers use to portray whiteness alone as mute, unfathomable, veiled, curtained, dreaded, and implacable. Toni Morrison interest in how blackness and the black body have been used to speak the unspeakable through the use of Africanism or the 'fetishizing of color' teaches more about the transference to the blackness of the power of illicit chaos, anarchy, strangeness, and impropriety to prove the existence of a new but vain white American in the American literature.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

I, hereby declare that there is no conflict of interest about this research study. I did read the novel myself, set up the theme to develop, collect data and frame out the whole content basing on materials which I gathered from different sources. Arguments and novel-based evidences are dispatched all through the article, written under personal care and perspectives.

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