



A Psychoanalytic Comparison of Character Development in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Thomas Wolfe's Narratives: A Quest for Self-Discovery

Toni Morrison'un Süleyman'ın Şarkısı ve Thomas Wolfe'un Anlatılarında Karakter Gelişiminin Psikanalitik Bir Karşılaştırması: Bir Öz Benlik Arayışı

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Abstract

Artists produce works that are interpreted as manifestations of their subconscious, often based on experiences and fictional elements that stimulate readers' cognitive processes, broaden their perspectives, and encourage critical thinking. Critics and readers analyze the artist's subconscious creations objectively, attempting to uncover the underlying reality behind the apparent truth by examining the impetus that drives the artist's creative process. In doing so, they frequently analyze the work, characters, and artists and events depicted within it. Discerning readers, who may be considered researchers, occasionally compare two distinct sources from specific perspectives, elucidating the similarities and differences between the compared works. Literary works have been examined from various perspectives throughout the centuries, and based on the analysis of these works, it has been possible to obtain comprehensive information about artists' personalities, the historical context in which they lived, circumstances of the people during that period. Moreover, there have been studies that facilitate the analysis of historical periods or simply provide entertainment value. The aim of this study is to examine the self-exploration of the lost characters brought to life in the works of two renowned American authors—one Caucasian and the other African American—through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

Keywords

Thomas Wolfe, Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism, Search for Self, Toni Morrison, The Lost Individual.

Öz

Kendilerinin bilinçaltı olarak kabul gören eserlerinde sanatçılar bazen yaşanmışlıklardan bazen kurgulardan yola çıkarak okurun zihnine lezzet hissi veren, zihnini açan ve onu düşünmeye sevk eden yaratımlar meydana getirmektedirler. Okur ve Eleştirmen ise sanatçının bilinç altından süzerek ürettiği bu dünyayı nesnel bir gözle inceleyip onu yaratıma götüren itkinin kaynağına inip görünen gerçekliğin ardındaki gizli gerçekliği bulmaya çalışır. Bunu yaparken kimi zaman sanatçıyı, eseri ve kimi zaman da sanatçının yaratımı olan eserde hayat bulan karakterleri ve olayları analiz ederler. Birer araştırmacı olarak da değerlendirebileceğimiz dikkatli okurlar, bazen farklı iki kaynağı belli açılardan karşılaştırarak, karşılaştırılan eserlerin benzerlik ve farklılıklarını gün yüzüne çıkarırlar. Bu gayeyle, edebi eserler asırlarca farklı açılardan ele alınıp incelenmiş, eserlerin analizinden yola çıkılarak sanatçıların kişilikleri, yaşadıkları dönem ve o dönem yaşayan insanların ekonomik, sosyolojik ve politik yaşantıları hakkında derinlemesine bilgi sahibi olmak mümkün olabilmektedir. Buna ek olarak bazen dönem analizi yapmamızı sağlayan bazen de sadece eğlenmemize vesile olan çalışmalar ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışmada biri beyaz diğeri siyahi iki ünlü Amerikalı yazarın romanlarında hayat verdikleri yitik bireylerin benlik arayışlarını Sigmund Freud'un geliştirdiği psikanalitik kuram ışığında ele alacağım.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Thomas Wolfe, Psikanalitik Edebiyat Eleştirisi, Benlik Arayışı, Toni Morrison, Yitik Birey.

Introduction¹

Art and literature, which can be argued to have existed since the inception of humanity, have evolved over time and taken on their present form. While it is not feasible to discuss the existence of written literature in ancient times in its current context, oral literature persisted throughout each historical period. Every nation has endeavored to create its own art and literature by focusing on core values. With the impact of geographical discoveries, art, which had developed and disseminated in narrow boundaries until then, transcended borders through the agency of merchants and began to contribute new aspects to diverse cultures. It would no longer be possible to speak of pure literature or art, as interactions between nations led to works being influenced by innovations, thus maturing, developing, and enriching.

Literature is one of the means to convey human emotions and thoughts, it can be posited that it is one of the branches of art most affected and improved by human interaction. In their works, which are regarded as manifestations of their subconscious, artists produce creations that stimulate the reader's mind, impart wisdom, and encourage critical thinking, sometimes based on fiction and sometimes on experience. Additionally, readers and critics examine the world produced by the artist's subconscious from an objective perspective, striving to uncover the concealed reality behind visible reality by examining the source of the impulse that leads to creation. At times, they attempt to find this hidden power by analyzing the artist, their work, or the characters and events that come to life in the artist's creation. A discerning reader sometimes compares two different sources from certain perspectives, elucidating the differences and similarities between the compared works.

In accordance with the aforementioned intentions, literary works have been scrutinized from various angles for centuries, and based on the analysis of these works, it has been possible to gain in-depth knowledge about the artist's personality, the period in which they lived, and the sociological, economic, and political lives of the people of that era. Furthermore, there have been studies that sometimes enable the reader to analyze the period in which the works were created, and sometimes simply allow for enjoyment. Regardless of the artist's aim, the reader seeks to derive benefits from the work produced. In this study, the narratives of Toni Morrison and Thomas Wolfe, two significant American writers who wrote artistic works in different periods, will be examined within the context of the psychoanalytic theory developed by Sigmund Freud. We deliberately limited the scope of our study, as it is predicated on examining both works within a psychoanalytic context.

1. Thomas Wolfe and Toni Morrison

Thomas Wolfe, who overcame the biases he held at the outset of his literary career and was refined through continuous writing, is a prominent author who became the voice of marginalized groups, including African Americans and oppressed segments of society. Born in a large Southern family at the beginning of the 20th century, he was raised in an environment characterized by anti-Semitic and anti-black sentiments which were prevalent in the Southern United States during that period. Morton I. Teicher claims that Wolfe's mother "Julia Wolfe was an outspoken anti-Semite and that she transmitted this prejudice to her son" (1998, p. 25). He also says that:

During Wolfe's early years, prevailing anti-Semitism had an undoubted influence on him. Anti-Semitic attitudes were rife in his town, his time, and his family. Bigotry was part of the collective mythology as he grew up. He had all the beliefs, images, and ideas of a white middle-class Southerner in the first part of the twentieth century. Anti-Semitism was a component of this culture, and Wolfe's anti-Semitism developed almost naturally because of the society to which he belonged. (p. 25)

Due to the inhumane ideologies to which he has been exposed, he is unable to overcome his prejudices and biases against the aforementioned groups, a characteristic shared by many Southerners. An analysis of Wolfe's works, which are considered autobiographical novels with elements of the river novel genre, reveals a clear manifestation of the author's aforementioned prejudices and animosity in his debut novel *Look Homeward, Angel*. Throughout his narratives, Wolfe wrote about his own people, himself, and America.

Toni Morrison (1931- 2019), the other pivotal author of our study, addresses two fundamental themes in her narratives. In her works, she predominantly explores the experiences of African Americans who are oppressed, and commodified as slaves, in particular, women who are subjected to humiliation, disdain, and oppression by both other African Americans and white individuals. The *Song of Solomon* is significant because in this novel, Morrison prioritizes the spiritual journey of the male

¹ This article is derived from the study titled 'The Self-Search of Lost Heroes: A Psychoanalytic Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and The Narratives of Thomas Wolfe', which was presented as a full-text paper at the symposium titled ISPECT 6th International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities in 2021.

protagonist and his quest for self-discovery. The novel not only addresses the trauma of slavery and its enduring effects, but also presents a path towards healing and self-realization for its characters and, by extension, for the African American community. "Her study encompasses a multidimensional quest: the search for roots, family, and identity; the acquisition of autonomy and commitment; the pursuit of humanity, clarity, and growth; and the ability to define and make choices" (Reed, 1988, p. 52). Wilentz argues that "*Song of Solomon* is a complex novel with an unresolved ending which has been seen as a Biblical allegory, detective novel, and a young man's search for his roots." (1992, p. 62). Similar to Wolfe, Toni Morrison fictionalizes her personal recollections, contemporary events, and the realities conveyed through collective social memory in her literary works. To Wilentz, "Morrison's writings are deeply entrenched in her own Black folk roots and community in which she grew up." (1992, p. 61) Morrison and Wolfe state that their works are fiction, "Anyway, if a work consists of pure reality, that work is either a diary or nothing more than an autobiography" (Akar, 2019, p. 62).² Although the density of emotion they add to the work makes the reader feel that one side of their works is definitely based on real experiences, Sigmund Freud claims that "Goethe was not only a great confessor, on the other side he was meticulously concealing himself, despite the many autobiographical explanations in his works" (2013, p. 37). Through this assertion, he emphasizes the artist's mastery by drawing attention to the fact that artists can present factual information by concealing it, potentially through subtle modifications as if it were fictional. Indeed, as Yilmaz Özbek reports, Freud's perspective on this matter is as follows: "A work of art is not only a product of imagination, but also a reflection of the moods of the artist leaking from the subconscious" (2007, p. 15). Even in works of art purported to be purely fictional, it can be observed that certain experiences and elements persist in the cognitive realm. These features can be observed in the works of both authors, as demonstrated below.

2. The Self-Search of Lost Heroes

Thomas Wolfe, whose works reflect his own experiences as Freud posits for all artists, is an individual who is compelled to live in isolation within a crowded family environment and is perpetually engaged in a spiritual quest. His mother's preoccupation with the pursuit of wealth, commonly referred to as the American Dream, which was prevalent among Americans of that era, rather than attending to the needs of young Thomas and his siblings, results in Wolfe's development as a child deprived of maternal affection. Donald states her desire of being rich as follows: "She spent more and more of her time on real estate speculations, convinced that it would make her as rich as her brothers, and she thought of herself as a hard-nosed investor" (1987, p. 27). His father is characterized by chronic alcohol consumption and neglect of family responsibilities. In addition to these adverse circumstances, primitive elements such as racial animosity and anti-Semitism ingrained in Wolfe's subconscious exert significant negative influences on his psychological and personal development.

Thomas Wolfe has endeavored to obscure his personal experiences, actual events, and individuals in all his literary works. In Wolfe's novels, the spiritual quests and challenges of the characters Eugene Gant and George Webber, who are closely associated with the author and nearly represent his id, are examined. Eugene Gant is the protagonist of Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and The River*, while George Webber is the protagonist of *The Web and The Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. In these novels, one can observe the spiritual journeys of the protagonists, the difficulties they encounter, and the act of writing that ultimately facilitates catharsis and enables their development. Both protagonists in Wolfe's novels are young males who experience a profound sense of isolation and alienation, which can be characterized as psychoanalytical neuroses.

Milkman in *Song of Solomon* was compelled to mature, akin to Eugene or George, under the influence of his real estate magnate father and the apathy of his cynical mother. Milkman, who was prohibited from interacting with ordinary African Americans because of his family's affluence and social status, is an individual who, for an extended period, approaches other African Americans with prejudice and avoids them to the extent possible. This prejudice is so pronounced that he does not even meet his own aunt, Pilate, until a certain age, due to his father's negative influence. When comparing Morrison's Milkman, which to Middleton "is a story about reconstituting the memory of the past and connecting it with the experiences of the present" (1993, p. 72), with Eugene or George, we encounter individuals who exhibit both conflicting and similar aspects. Prior to proceeding to the main section of our study, it is essential for the reader to understand the issues addressed in this research.

These differences and similarities may elicit inquiries from readers. For instance, Morrison, an African American author, has endeavored to portray African Americans as subjects of historical atrocities since the colonization of America by employing collective memory in her psychological novels. Conversely, Wolfe was born and raised in a society that perpetuated this cruelty towards African Americans, subconsciously harboring similar sentiments of hatred and marginalization, influenced

² Unless otherwise stated, this and subsequent references to Turkish works have been translated into English by me for the purposes of this study.

by his sociocultural environment. The question may arise: "How can authors from such disparate backgrounds be the subject of the same study?" While this inquiry has merit, subsequent examples will elucidate the appropriateness of this comparison.

This study aims to elucidate the endeavors of the novel's protagonists in their pursuit of spirituality, examining their self-development within a psychoanalytic framework and their quest for personal truth. Eugene Gant (George Webber) and Milkman are presented as neurotic individuals profoundly influenced by societal pressures. Wolfe and Morrison exhibit dual trajectories: inward and outward movements. In analyzing Wolfe's literary corpus:

There are two essential movements: outward and downward. The outward movement describes the effort of a child, a boy, and a youth for release, freedom, and loneliness in new lands... The downward movement is represented by a constant excavation into the buried life of a group of people and describes the cyclic curve of a family's life- genesis, union, decay, and dissolution. (Wolfe, 1956, p. 129)

Eugene Gant anticipates finding solace as he distances himself from the stifling atmosphere of his family, roots, and environment, partially disengaging from them. Milkman is oppressed by his father's domineering attitude, who, like Eugene Gant's mother, engages in real estate transactions and is the preeminent property owner in the neighborhood. Analogous to Eugene, Milkman must mature while being exposed to domestic incestuous relationships. Growing up in such an environment may result in incomplete psychological development. Due to the influence of these adverse factors, both characters harbor prejudice against African Americans: Eugene, as a white Southerner, harbors racial animus, whereas Milkman, as the son of an affluent and esteemed African American man, exhibits internalized racism.

Eugene's intellectual development and increased empathy for marginalized individuals will commence upon his relocation from the town of Ashville and the initiation of his collegiate education. He encounters diverse societal groups and begins to comprehend their perspectives and experiences. He will become a man who is "speaking for Jews and for the German people who could no longer do so for themselves- giving voice to the voiceless..." (Falls, 2011, p. 71). Previously, he aspired to achieve fame and dedicated himself to this pursuit. Consequently, he characterizes the artist as follows: "This is the artist, then- life's hungry man, the glutton of eternity, beauty's misery, glory's slave..." (Wolfe, 1944, p. 551). Following his enlightenment, he transforms into an 'other-centered' individual and portrays the artist as such: "He is the tongue of his unuttered brothers, he is the language of man's buried heart, he is man's music, and life's great discoverer..." (Wolfe, 1944, p. 551). Milkman's intellectual awakening, while seemingly implausible, is anticipated to commence following his acquaintance with his aunt, Pilate. Although "Pilate becomes an 'embodied Muse' – at once both Beatrice and Virgil- without whom Milkman can not find the path that leads him back (even as his journey takes him forward) to a cultural identity that transcends base self-interests" (Bryant, 1999, p. 106), his father forbids his family from meeting her because of some of the events of his childhood with his sister. Milkman, a boy who experiences contentment in his life until he encounters his aunt, is profoundly astonished when he learns about his origins for the first time. Subsequently, he embarks on a quest to uncover his heritage and roots, prompted by the suggestions of Guitar, who is his close and, until that point, sole confidant. Guitar desires Milkman to become cognizant of certain realities, akin to his own experiences, as an individual who has endured the full extent of marginalization, deprivation, adversity, and various forms of discrimination, yet maintains a connection to his past. From now on, "Milkman is working his way toward solving the riddle of his family background" (Reed, 1988, p. 59).

As observed in Eugene, it is possible to discern two distinct outward and inward movements in Milkman. The inward developmental movement can be characterized as follows: under the influence of his friend Guitar, his aunt Pilate, who "educates the central hero into maturity" (Imbrie, 1993, p. 482), and his beloved Hagar, the granddaughter of his aunt, Milkman embarks on a journey to the lands where his father was born and raised, seeking to uncover his origins. The objective of this journey is to discover his authentic identity and origin. His status as a Black individual does not provide sufficient fulfillment, as he, like Eugene, experiences spiritual hunger and trauma. According to Mozdastan, this process of self-discovery is portrayed through a nonlinear narrative structure, utilizing episodic delivery and flashbacks to illustrate the overwhelming impact of trauma (2014, p. 79).

It is important to note that there is a distinction between Milkman and Eugene. Milkman achieves his spiritual well-being as he approaches his origin, the land where his family was born and raised, while Eugene attains spiritual well-being as he distances himself from his hometown. Eugene observes instances of intense animosity directed towards blacks and Jews, emanating from both his family and various societal strata in which he resides. To Kennedy, "He was brought up in a family and a social class which expressed this prejudice blatantly" (1962, p. 167). The homicide of individuals of African descent is a prevalent and normalized occurrence within certain societal contexts. This phenomenon is observed in Wolfe's *The Web and The Rock* as a commonplace action:

Came home to supper, an' took off his coat, hung up his gun and cottridge belt, washed his hands and set down at the table, and had got half-way through his supper before even he thought of it. Says to my maw, all of a sudden, says 'Oh yes! I clean forgot to tell you! I had to shoot a nigger today.' (1947, p. 37)

Given that these circumstances and attitudes impede his self-discovery, he experiences a sense of solace as he distances himself from his place of residence. Conversely, Milkman is consistently subjected to prejudice and discriminatory rhetoric against other African Americans alongside his parents, thus finding tranquility upon arriving at his ancestral habitat, the birthplace, and nurturing the ground of his forebears. He is compelled to harbor animosity towards his aunt Pilate. His father prohibits him from establishing a close relationship with Pilate. He inquires about the rationale as follows: "You told me to stay away from there. To stay away from Pilate... But you never told me why. They're our cousins. She's your own sister" (Morrison, 2004, p. 76). Affluent African Americans exhibit antipathy toward economically disadvantaged African Americans, while individuals of lower socioeconomic status harbor resentment toward the wealthy. We can see this situation palpable as follows:

Some of the black people who saw the car passing by sighed with good-humored envy at the classiness, the dignity of it. In 1936 there were very few among them who lived as well as Macon Dead. Others watched the family gliding by with a tiny bit of jealousy and a whole lot of amusement, for Macon's wide green Packard belied what they thought a car was for. (Morrison, 2004, p. 53)

Indeed, the location of his father, Macon Dead, was unfamiliar. When examining the similarities and distinctions between Milkman and Eugene, the following observation emerges: As Milkman progresses toward his origins, undertaking an inward journey, he experiences spiritual relaxation, whereas Eugene, moving away from his roots in an outward trajectory, also experiences spiritual relaxation. This parallel occurs because both individuals are removed from societal and familial pressures and impositions.

3. Psychoanalytic Theory and Relaxation of Protagonists

The psychoanalytic literary criticism, considered one of the predominant approaches in contemporary literary studies, examines the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature. According to M.A.R. Habib, building on Freud's theories, later psychologists and literary critics have broadened the scope of psychoanalytic criticism. This expansion includes examining an author's motivations, as well as those of readers and fictional characters, and connecting a text to aspects of the author's life, such as childhood experiences and parental relationships. It also involves exploring the nature of creativity, understanding how readers psychologically respond to literature, interpreting symbols to reveal hidden meanings, analyzing the links between different authors within a literary tradition, investigating gender roles and stereotypes, and studying how language contributes to both conscious and unconscious thought. (2005, p. 572). Scholars employing this methodology endeavor to access the subconscious of the artist who creates the work based on the artist's oeuvre. Mahmut Akar posits that these researchers, through their analysis of the artist's creative output, aim to elucidate the internal psychological processes of the artist during the act of creation and the subsequent effects of this process on the artist (2019, p. 1). Furthermore, the psychoanalytic approach holds such significance for certain critics and researchers that Yılmaz Özbek asserts the impossibility of conducting a comprehensive analysis of an artwork without it, effectively precluding the exploration of the artist's subconscious. Özbek articulates this perspective as follows:

Invisible dimensions are as important as the visible dimensions in the research. The author can unwittingly give spirit to his work by feeding on the subconscious. It may be necessary to look at work from a psychological perspective, and even without it, analyzing can be challenging and the results can be strange. (2007, p. 4)

In contemporary discourse, prominent critics and theorists frequently conceptualize artistic works as manifestations of the artist's subconscious. The artist employs a methodology akin to the free association technique utilized by psychologists in the treatment of neurotic patients, applying this approach to the writing process, and ultimately facilitating a form of therapeutic intervention. Ahmet Sarı conceptualizes the artist as an individual who experiences relief through "Literary relaxation or consciousness-memory masturbation" (2008, p. 67). Based on these interpretations, it can be inferred that researchers are endeavoring to investigate the imperceptible reality underlying visible reality, specifically, the impetus that drives the artist to create. The question, 'Why does the artist need to create?' is explored through various lenses: the artwork itself, the characters developed by the artist within that work, and the artist's own id. If the act of writing, creating, or producing indeed provides a form of relief or treatment, as posited by Freud's theory, it may be reasonable to suggest that artists, such as Wolfe and Morrison, have engaged in a form of self-psychoanalysis, achieving catharsis through the continuous expression of their emotions and memories, which are metaphorically likened to overwhelming floods.

When examining Milkman's and Eugene's similarities from a psychoanalytic slant, it becomes evident that both individuals develop in environments characterized by distorted familial relationships. Freud posits that every male child harbors sexual feelings toward his mother, whereas every female child experiences similar sentiments toward her father, and he calls this phenomenon as Oedipus complex. He articulates this concept as follows, "Here we find a clue to go further. This step-in development does not involve a simple change of object. Separation from the mother is accompanied by hostility; attachment to the mother results in hatred"(1997, p. 150). Upon examination of Eugene's family dynamics, the relationship between his sister Mabel and their father exhibits characteristics indicative of an Electra complex. During periods of the father's alcohol-induced crises, his daughter exclusively possessed the ability to alleviate his distress. Wolfe observes these phenomena and articulates this situation as follows:

The sad family of this world is damned altogether, and joined, from its birth in an unspoken and grievous kinship: in the incestuous loves of sons and mothers; in Lesbian hungers and parricidal hatreds; in the terrible shames of sons and fathers, and the uneasy shifting of their eyes; in the insatiable sexuality of infancy, in our wild hunger for ourself, the dear love of our excrement, the great obsession of Narcissus, and the strange first love of every boy, which is for a man. (Donald, 1987, p. 149)

The same phenomenon manifests more prominently in the case of Milkman. Upon the demise of Milkman's grandfather, his mother removes her attire and reclines beside her father's corpse. Macon Dead describes this ignominious scene as follows:

In the bed, he said, and stopped for so long Milkman was not sure he was going to continue. In the bed. That's where she was when I opened the door. Laying next to him. Naked as a yard dog, kissing him. Him dead and white and puffy and skinny, and she had his fingers in her mouth. (Morrison, 2004, p. 103)

Bryant explains this scene as such: "... the narrator references to Ruth's relationship to her dead father conjures ambiguous images of incest and necrophilia that become clearer, although no less perverse, later in the text when her husband, Macon Dead, recounts the event to their son, Milkman" (1999, p. 100). When examining these narratives from Milkman's mother's point of view through a psychoanalytic lens, it becomes evident that an individual who accepts her father as her primary love object will respond to his loss. In addition to the aforementioned factors, a notable similarity between the two protagonists is the centrality of the Oedipus complex in Milkman and Eugene's lives. Eugene is characterized as a child who is deeply attached to his mother, continuing to breastfeed until the age of six and sharing her bed until the age of 12. Sigmund Freud depicts such individuals as, "... those types of people who are known as 'eternal sucklings'—who cannot tear themselves away from the blissful situation at the mother's breast, and who, all through their lives, persist in a demand to be nourished by someone else" (1923, p. 104). To Eagleton, "The little baby will suck his mother's breast for milk, but while doing this movement, he will discover that this biologically necessary activity also gives him pleasure, which is the beginning of sexuality according to Freud" (2014, p. 163). As Eagleton posits, it may not be feasible to definitively ascertain whether Eugene's prolonged nursing in his mother's breast constitutes an act of sexual gratification. In the manuscript of *The Web and The Rock*, Wolfe's novel, the dialogue between the protagonist and his romantic partner, who is 19 years older than him, indicates that the novel's hero may not have successfully resolved the oral stage of psychosexual development. Furthermore, it reveals the subconscious sexual desire towards the primary love object (mother) that persists within the hero's psyche:

Holding Esther's breasts, George asked her, 'Am I your child?' 'Yes' she answered breathlessly, 'yes.' 'Are these my breasts?' 'Yes' she replied, 'yes. ' 'Have you any milk there for me?' When she said that she had none, he snorted, 'Hah, if you really loved me, you would have milk for me. (Donald, 1987:137)

These expressions, which emerge involuntarily from the subconscious of the protagonist, indicate that the sucking action characteristic of infancy may resurface in individuals who are unable to successfully complete the developmental phase. This behavior may manifest as a demand for oral gratification from romantic partners who serve as maternal substitutes in later stages of life. Eugene is likely to experience difficulties with the oral phase due to insufficient maternal care and, according to his perception, premature weaning (from his primary sexual object, the breast). If we accept that, as Freud posits, "The first sexual object of the child is the mother's breast and this sets the prototype for all subsequent love relationships" (2015, p. 318), we can say that our hero sincerely accepts the mother-lover prototype.

The Oedipal elements that predominate in Milkman's life are not concealed, as in Eugene's case, but manifest. The novel reveals through various expressions that the protagonist's appellation 'Milkman' stems from his failure to successfully navigate the oral stage of development, akin to Eugene, and consequently, his inability to detach from his primary sexual object, the maternal breast, for an extended period: "My mother was breastfeeding me when I was old enough to talk, stand, wear trousers, and someone saw this and laughed, and that's why my father and mother never used that name" (Morrison, 1992, p. 81). When we

consider the fact that his parents do not use this name from a psychoanalytic perspective, his father's non-use is due to his mental neglect of the sexual intercourse that he thought existed between his wife and his own son. Oedipal desires, as Freud argues, compel the boy to stay away from his mother for fear of castration because he does not want to experience his father's obvious hostility. (2015, p. 364). Akar clarifies this issue as follows:

According to this theory, which states that the boy has sexual feelings toward his mother, the child sees his father as a rival, an enemy, and when he realizes that he will not be able to defeat this enemy in time and believes that his father will castrate him because of this cheeky feeling towards his mother, he conceals his feelings towards his mother. (2019, p. 172)

The father-son antagonism or conflict previously mentioned is evidently a struggle for maternal affection. Milkman discovers the reason his father, Macon Dead, prohibited him from spending extended periods indoors with his mother, stemming from a confrontation in his early youth. The extent of Macon Dead's possessiveness toward his wife and son becomes apparent during a family excursion when Milkman requires urination. Macon Dead refuses to allow his wife to attend to his son; instead, he dispatches his daughter to assist Milkman. Morrison describes this scene as follows:

Magdalene called Lena took a deep breath. 'Up ahead you could pull over, Daddy. He might mess up the seat.' Macon glanced at her in the mirror and slowed down. 'Who's going to take him?' Ruth fiddled with the door handle. 'Not you,' Macon said to her. Ruth looked at her husband. She parted her lips but didn't say anything. 'Not me,' said Corinthians. 'I have on high heels.' 'Come on,' Lena sighed. They left the car, little boy and big sister, and disappeared into the trees that reared up off the shoulder of the road. (2004, p. 426)

Numerous additional aspects of both protagonists can be incorporated into the aforementioned similarities and differences. In brief, Eugene and Milkman are two individuals of contrasting racial backgrounds who have experienced lifelong isolation and loss, living detached from society and their families. Both reject prevailing societal values and embark on spiritual quest for a more meaningful existence. Upon realizing the challenges faced by authentic African Americans, in contrast to his sheltered upbringing, Milkman renounces his father's wealth and takes action to earn his livelihood. According to Ramirez, "Milkman has been changed by his identity quest. He has become much more confident" (2012, p. 122). Motivated by recollections shared by his father regarding his childhood, Milkman embarks on a quest to locate a cave he believes contains gold. In actuality, his pursuit is not for gold but for the intrinsic value concealed within his psyche, a realization that will elude Milkman until he reaches the cave. Milkman's catharsis or spiritual enlightenment occurs as he goes down the dark cave, delving into the depths of his subconscious. "On his identity search he has regained and his African heritage family knowledge" (Ramirez, 2012, p. 125) This analysis posits that the cave Milkman enters in search of gold serves as a metaphor for the subconscious. While Milkman fails to discover the anticipated gold, he achieves self-realization, which is arguably more valuable than material wealth. Consequently, he emerges from the cave as an individual with a well-developed superego. Imbrie advocates this idea as such: "... he feels new affection for his father, although little has changed in their relationship; he has lost interest in the gold he had originally set out to find; he accepted responsibility for Hagar's death" (1993, p. 480). "Milkman's own search, however, reaches beyond the gold which is the final aim for both his father and Guitar" (Wilentz, 1992, p. 70). Presently, he has the ability to view individuals of African descent, who constitute his own society, from a distinct perspective and takes pride in his African heritage.

Upon returning to Eugene, we encounter an individual who demonstrates a clear sense of purpose and dedicates himself to advocating for the marginalized. Edwin Berry Burgum posits that if Wolfe exhibits indications of prejudice and animosity towards various social structures, it is not attributable to him personally, as there exists societal antipathy towards African Americans and immigrants, whom Burgum refers to as "traditional victims" (1953, p. 186), and this antipathy is inculcated in children. He asserts that the most significant indicator of the positive transformation in Wolfe's intellectual perspective is the alteration of his protagonist's name to George Webber in his two final novels. Burgum characterizes this modification as follows:

That Wolfe Had some awareness of what was taking place within him seems denoted by his shift of hero in midstream. Eugene Gant, who is associated with the events most illustrative of distortion, gives way to George ('Monk') Webber in the two posthumous novels of his later transformation. (1953, p. 186)

In *The Web and The Rock*, Eugene, who previously prioritized fame in his life, begins to develop a social conscience. He becomes aware of marginalized individuals due to their lifestyle, socioeconomic circumstances, ethnicity, and religious beliefs. Consequently, he recognizes the necessity of societal contribution and dedicates his literary efforts to advocating for the rights of those unable to express themselves. This transformation exemplifies the profound alteration experienced by an individual

who shifts focus from personal interest to societal concerns. Wolfe articulates this sentiment in *You Can't Go Home Again* as follows:

But it is not only at these outward forms that we must look to find the evidence of the nation's hurt. We must look as well as at the heart of guilt that beats in each of us, for there the cause lies. We must look, and with our own eyes see, the central core of defeat and shame and failure which we have wrought in the lives of even the least of these, our brothers. And why must we look? Because we must probe to the bottom of our collective wound. As men, as Americans, we can no longer cringe away and lie. Are we not all warmed by the same sun, frozen by the same cold, shone on by the same lights of time and terror here in America? Yes, and if we do not look and see it, we shall be all damned together. (1964, p. 308)

This process enables him to attain the tranquility he has sought for a long time and to recognize that he is no longer adrift. While engaging in these activities, akin to Milkman, he acknowledges the necessity of relinquishing his possession. In this way, he manifests as a person whose superego has developed and successfully completed his developmental stages in a psychologically well manner.

4. Conclusion

Consequently, this study delves into the intricate character development of the two protagonists, Eugene and Milkman, drawn from distinct novels. This offers a comprehensive analysis of their profound transformations and psychological journeys, highlighting the complex interplay between individual growth and societal influence. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, these characters share common experiences of alienation, isolation, and an arduous quest for self-discovery, which serve as catalysts for their metamorphosis. Milkman's narrative arc is portrayed as both a metaphorical and literal descent into a cave, a powerful symbol representing his exploration of the depths of his subconscious and rich cultural heritage. This foremost experience serves as the cornerstone of his transformation, marking a significant shift from a self-centered individual to a person who not only embraces but also takes pride in his black identity. This journey leads Milkman to develop a profound sense of connection with his community, fostering a newfound appreciation for his roots and the collective experiences of his people.

Eugene's (George) character evolution, although different in nature, is equally coercive. His journey was characterized by a dramatic shift in priorities and values. Initially driven by the self-focused pursuit of fame and personal recognition, he underwent a profound change that redirected his energies toward social justice and support for marginalized groups. This transformation reflects a deepening of his social consciousness and growing awareness of his responsibility to use his impact for the greater good. This study frames these character transformations within a psychoanalytic context, thereby providing a deeper analysis of their developmental trajectories. It emphasizes the gradual strengthening and formation of superegos, which represents the internalization of ethical principles, moral values, and societal norms. This psychological growth is portrayed as a crucial element in their journey towards a more mature and socially conscious state of being.

As the characters progress through their respective journeys, they encounter various challenges and obstacles that test their resolve and compel them to confront their innermost fears and desires. These trials serve as crucibles for personal growth, pushing Milkman and Eugene to re-evaluate their values, beliefs, and places in the world. This study suggests overcoming the challenges that both characters can achieve a more integrated sense of self and a clearer understanding of their purpose in life. The parallel drawn between Eugene and Milkman's journeys emphasizes the universal nature of the quest for identity and belonging, transcending the boundaries of culture, race, and social background. These stories serve as powerful examples of how individuals can overcome societal constraints and personal limitations to achieve self-actualization and make meaningful contributions to society. Ultimately, the study posits that through their transformative experiences, both Eugene and Milkman attain the purpose and peace they had long been seeking. Their journeys culminate in a state of greater self-awareness, social responsibility, and personal fulfillment. This resolution suggests that self-discovery and true growth often require a willingness to confront one's inner demons and embrace one's authentic self-challenge and societal expectations.

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