

## **Toni Morrison Tar Baby Compared to Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe**

**Latifa Ahmed AL- Radaydeh**

**Dr. Nayera EL Miniawi**

### **Abstract**

*Once the events of Tar Baby took place on an island , (the Caribbean) which is depicted as a quiet and beautiful. An island which is remot from civilization, the incidents of Robinson Crusoe, also took place on a quiet beautiful isolated island Both islands were described as quiet and beautiful. From an external judgment since no one knows what was going on those two islands?. What masteries do they hide? What kind of hidden chaos was waiting the two visitors in both works(Robison & son)? Robinson, in Robinson Crusoe and son, in Tar Baby thought that those islands are peaceful and are full of tranquility. Thus, both of them were shocked to find so many adventures on them.*

**Keywords:** race, class, sex

### ***Toni Morrison's Biography***

Toni Morrison was born on February 18. 1931 .She was the second baby in a family of six. Her father was George wofford and her mother was Ramah Willis. Morrison was born in Ohio, the place to which her family moved escaping racism in the south. The family moved to the North hopping to find better life and better opportunities. There, her father worked three jobs in order to support his family. His main job was a welder in a shipyard. George Wofford was a hardworking dignified man. His work was of a high quality so that every time he welded a ship, he also welded his name onto the side of that ship. For Morrison's mother, she was a church-going woman and she also sang in the choir.

Morrison's first name was Chloe. she was used to listen to many songs and tales of southern black folklore. In her first grade, Morrison was the only black student and the only one who can read. Her relation with white class mates was good and she never encountered discrimination until she began dating.(LI .(2010,Choe inherited her father's despise to white people. She admitted that when she said her father was a racist and that he had spent his life despising all whites. (Denard(2008

Choe was an ambitious girl. First she was hoping to be a famous dancer then she turned to reading books. She read for the Russian, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky; for the French Gustave and for the English ,Jane Austen, Thus. She spent her study life as a brilliant student.(Bloom . (2002 She studied in Lorain high school, then joined Howard university in Washington ,P.C.

She majored in English. She made several visits to the south , the place from which her parents escaped. She was the first hand of the black there. She graduated from Howard university with a B.A degree in .1953 Then she had had her master degree from Cornel university in Ithaca in the year.1955

She began her career field at Texas southern university in Houston. At this university, Morrison was able to talk about the black culture on what was called " Negro history week)"Haskins .(2001 She introduced the black culture as a discipline rather than just personal reminiscences. In .1957 She met Harold Morrison at Howard university and Married him in .1958 This era was a time of civil rights activists. She met many of them. For example, she met Amiri Baraka and Andrew young.

Morrison had had two children. She continued working beside taking care of them. She joined a small writers group, where she was able to share in discussing different pieces of literature with people who are interested in literature like her. An amazing incident happened with her at one of her meetings with this group was when she wrote a story about a girl whom she knew in the past, Loraine, who had prayed to God for blue eyes. The story was well received by the group and later on, Toni found that the story was one of her masterpieces. She took it and turned it into a novel titled *The Bluest eye*\_(1970) Gillespie .(2012 After that she wrote her second novel , *sula* ,(1973).a novel which shed light on a friendship between two adult black women.

This book was selected by the book-of-the-Month club and it was nominated for the 1975 National Book Award in fiction. In 1977 she wrote her *song of Solomon*, in which she focused on black male characters. She was inspired to do so, as she was watching her sons growing up. The main theme of this novel was the lost identity. Its narrator is a male character who was looking for his identity. This novel, *song of Solomon*, won the national Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award. (Darnel 1994)

In 1981 her *Tar Baby* was born. A novel which is set on a Caribbean island. A novel which explores conflicts of race, class, and sex. In this novel, we find Morrison, for the first time makes an interaction between black and white characters. (Morrison 1982) In 1984 Morrison was named the Albert Schweitzer professor of the humanities at the state university of New York in Albany. And there, she wrote her first play, *Dreaming Emmett*. (Blue & Naden 2005)

In 1987 she published her *Beloved*, the novel which was based on a real story of a black woman who escaped from her master with her children and as she was captured she tried to kill her children. She stated that it is better for them to die rather than to live in slavery as their mothers did. This novel won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. In 1995 she wrote her novel *Jazz*. She also wrote works of criticism mainly, *Playing in the Dark*, *Whiteness and the literary Imagination*. (Li 2010)

In 1993 she received the Nobel prize in literature. She was the first black woman to gain this honor. In 1998 she published her seventh novel, *Paradise*. In 2003 she wrote her next novel, *Love*, then she wrote *Mercy*. In 2008 Morrison published a collection of her non-fiction writings entitled *What Moves at the Margin*. (Matus 1998) In 2012 she published her latest novel, *Home*.

In her writings, Morrison tackled many hot issues. Such issues are racism (color discrimination), feminism (gender) and post colonialism. (Bloom, 2012)

### **Summary of Tar Baby**

*Tar Baby* is a novel written by the American novelist Toni Morrison, it was first written in the late 1970s and was published in 1981. The events of the novel took place in The Caribbean, New York, and Florida.

Main characters of the novel are Jadine Childs, William Green (son), Valerian street, Margaret street, Sydney Childs, Odine Child, Gideon (yardman), Therese and Alma Estee. The novel tackled some literary themes like the issue of African Americans, New York life at the seventies, North Americans, class conflict, racism, slavery, interracial relationships, servants, Models and fashion. (Fultz 2003)

The novel begins shortly before Christmas when an unknown sailor jumps overboard and swims toward the shores of Queen of France.

Thus because he was unable to reach the shore, he climbed on a yacht and moved toward a small island called Isle des Chevaliers. There, he hides again this time in a house called Larbe de La Croix. This house was the Valerian street's and his wife, Margaret. In that house there were also Ondine, Sydney and Jadine Childs (the Ondine's niece). For Jadine, she is a well educated girl who studied at the Sorbonne and then worked as a model in Paris and for Margaret, she was always on conflict with her husband for her inviting guests against his wishes. One evening, Margaret quarreled with her husband and then went to her bedroom, to sleep. She quickly returned screaming that she found a man hiding in her closet. Everyone was terrified by the news except her husband because he who has invited this homeless man to his house. This man was (Son) the same one who climbed the yacht at the beginning of the novel.

Back to Jadine, we find her happy with her boyfriend who has sent her a luxurious sealskin coat. As she was trying the coat on, Son appeared in front of her and began to make some sexually crude remarks. Jadine became angry and threatened to report what he had done to Valerian. After that, we find Son as a cleaned tidy character to whom Jadine couldn't resist and became attracted to. Jadine and Son spent a lot of happy times wandering on the island living together and even sleeping at the same bed. They continued their trip by traveling to New York where they had a great carefree time as lovers. They lived there without jobs, they seemed not to care for money. In spring, the couple arrived on Eloë at Florida, Son's hometown; this journey was a disaster for them because Jadine hated Eloë and Son liked it. The main differences between the two have floated on the surface. When they came back to New York, they kept on fighting more and more. Jadine left him and went to Paris. Son arrived searching for her and Therese, the servant, agreed to take him to Isle des Chevaliers by boat.

But instead of taking him to the place where he can find Jadine, she left him in a foggy part of the island and she suggested that he either keep searching for Jadine, or he can join the race of wild horsemen on the island; here the island opened its arms to accommodate son as one of its horsemen. (Morrison(1982

### ***Analysis of the Novel***

*Tar Baby* traces the quest for self identify of Jadine Childs. Jadine seems to accept the constructions of the white culture and society. She has never rebelled against it. Even though she was a servants niece, her life was glamorous one. She had the best education at U.S.A and then she received her Master Degree in art history at the Sorbonne in Paris. she had started a career as a fashion Model. A rich Parisian young man wants to marry her, he bestowed her a sealskin coat as a sign for his great love. This means that for her, Jadine, can't see the wide gap between her and other cultures. Cultures always interact with each other, and certainly it is clear in the interaction between Anglo-American and African American cultures. Thus one can't ignore the obvious clash between cultures that Morrison tried to produce in her *Tar Baby*. Culture clash is described as important characteristic of the environment of *Tar Baby*. For example, it's obvious between cultures of people who live in Paris and in U.S.A compared to those who live in the Caribbean sea or in Eloe. (Mbalia(2004

On the remote island in the Caribbean sea lives the main characters which represents different cultures under examination. they are simply divided into Valerian and his wife, the retired rich candy manufacture the two white people in whose house Jadine and her relatives live. (people who represents the black culture). Added to them is Son, the "outlaws" who lives everywhere and nowhere, the representative of the diasporas in the novel. (Danielle .(1999

For this son, when he entered Jadine room, she saw in him an aggressive, wild uncivilized creature. This is caused by his being a homeless creature, wandering from place to another without having any kind of shelter. Jadine commented on his hair "hair that needed to be put in jail" "Tar Baby". (114 In this description of the stereotype of the dangerously aggressive Blackman. Therefore, she treated him as a stupid, uneducated, illiterate "nigger". "She even called him an" ape "then she addressed him as" you ugly barefoot baboon!.... A white man thought you were a human being and should be treated like one. He's civilized and made the mistake of thinking you might be too. that's because he didn't smell you. but I did and I know you're an animal because I smell you) "Morrison(1982

Here she insulted son by comparing him to a monkey, she even praises the white man, her master, who invited him to his house and dealt with him as a human being. Thus, all this reflects the character of son as a representative of a Diaspora character. Even Jadine's description of him reminds us of the characters of "Friday" the savage character in *Robinson Crusoe*. Then, we confront the idea of individual compared to the community; that's, when Jadine was talking to Son she addressed herself as "us", "thereby causing him to ask her" us, "who you are? You don't belong to this house! She answered first "I belong to me. But I live here)". Morrison(1982

She means that she works as Mrs. Margaret's private secretary then she is after all herself. By doing so, she proves her conformity to the Anglo-American culture and society, the society she was raised in. obviously here she defines herself by her work which is an important element in the Anglo-American society. We can also notice that the Black American culture is characterized by many ethos. Society is not seen as the arena where the individual can work and prove himself and gain a share of America benefits by his own efforts. To the black culture, these benefits are not attained only by the individual effort, but by a radical change in the nature of society the social, economical, political advancement of a whole race of people. (Danielle(1994

We as readers, we expect Jadine to associate herself with her family first, but we were shocked by the fact that she addressed herself to be associated first of all to herself, and then to the Margaret's house despite the fact that she appears to be self-reliant and self dependent. However by going back to son, one can notice that Morrison wants to say that being "outlaws" doesn't mean not belonging to a community no matter how annoying is that character, he remains a member of a human who deserve to have a community. She refers the whole idea of excluding an outlaw member completely from a community to be an Anglo-American idea. (Denard(2008

Thus even though son leads his life in an exile, he still have a community to which he belongs. Obviously, one can notice that Jadine represents the modern black generation who is greatly affected by the white culture and technology while son represents the raw black American character who still perceive the wide gap between his own culture and the Anglo-American one. When they both went to New York, one can notice the different reaction of both characters.

While Jadine felt that New York is the place where she can flourish and live the life she desires, Son saw New York as not a safe place for the African-American people to live in. This can explain the cultural clash they are both facing. Jadine's cultural background which is a mixture of both the black and the white, the old and the modern, the American and the European, and son's cultural background which consists of the south radical black culture, that belongs to the black community where he grew up. Here, son can't adjust to the different environment she suddenly finds herself in. (Bloom(2002

For that, he insisted on Eloe, his home town which represents the manifestation of his cultural beliefs. However, when he took Jadine to his home town, she found herself an alien there, she rejected it and the clash between the two has begun again. Obviously, what son expects from Jadine is further far from a white European view point which is represented in Jadine's. he expects a very traditional role: he dreams of a woman who is loving, caring and skillful in doing housework's. This dream won't match those of Jadine the modern, well educated woman who is even though with a black face, still have the personality of a literal European lady. She is a self-reliant woman who doesn't need others to confirm her worth, she even doesn't need to come for those who once cared for her, she only wants to care for her own individuality. (Haskins. (2001 Once again this proves Morrison's idea in using "binary opposition" like the opposition between the role of women as nurtures and women who pursue their career and plans. Morrison explains that one of the characteristics of black women is the ability to combine between both, being a mother and working outside.

### **Conclusion**

Since Jadine personifies the modern woman, she rejects the traditional role required from women. She tried to emphasize her personal goal as a modern woman. She rejected the romantic plot in which the heroine is usually sacrifices her own ideas and plans for the sake of her love. Indeed, Jadine is unwilling to do such sacrifice. However, for Son, I think he can be considered a hero, who is sent as a Christ-like to liberate Jadine from her wrong ways and from the destructing influences which she had in her character as she gained them from the white culture, her son is considered, a healer for Jadine's spiritual wounds. I expect that the characters of both Jadine and son were depicted with merits as well as with flaws. Obviously, I think that Morrison has succeeded in depicting the clash between cultures through depicting those two characters.

As Morrison herself once said in one of her interviews "the freedom of the individual lies in her/his possibility to choose, not in the possibility not to choose)." Danielle. (1994 Here Morrison is not giving remedies to complex social issues, she is just opening the horizons for the readers to think and meditate.

### **Tar Baby Compared to Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe**

Robinson Crusoe is a novel written by the *British* writer Daniel Defoe. (1719) This novel portrays the life and strange surviving adventures of a man called Robinson Crusoe who lived Eight and twenty years, all alone in an un-inhabited island of the coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoko. (Defoe(1719

This novel even though written in the eighteenth century has some shared features with *Tar Baby*, the novel written by Toni Morrison in the twentieth century.

Obviously, if one pays a quick look at both works he certainly will notice so many similarities.

Once the events of *Tar Baby* took place on an island, (the Caribbean) which is depicted as a quiet and beautiful. An island which is remote from civilization, the incidents of Robinson Crusoe, also took place on a quiet beautiful isolated island. Both islands were described as quiet and beautiful. From an external judgment since no one knows what was going on those two islands?. What masteries do they hide? What kind of hidden chaos was waiting the two visitors in both works (Robinson & son)? Robinson, in *Robinson Crusoe* and son, in *Tar Baby* thought that those islands are peaceful and are full of tranquility. Thus, both of them were shocked to find so many adventures on them.

Another point to be discussed about both novels is that even though both main characters (Robinson & son) were of different features and manners, they still had had so many things to learn from their experience on those isolated islands. Added to that one can notice a great resemblance between the description of both writers of the two characters, son and Friday, the savage character in *Robinson Crusoe*. we saw that Morrison has succeeded in describing son as a vulgar, savage character with dirty and filthy hair. Once he appeared in *Jadine's* room, the readers' imagination will immediately be able to fly to the description of Defoe's character Friday, in his *Robinson Crusoe*.

In addition to that , we can notice that both main characters of both novels have travelled in a journey from a civilized place to a savage one then back the civilized. They have undergone a process of change in their thoughts, their behaviors and their maturity, and despite the fact that both characters are of different colors, still they are humans who are capable of love, hatred and learning.

Consequently, I can mention as I see, one difference between both novels. While the theme in Robinson Crusoe, is to prove man's ability to survive and to start his life from the zero point, one theme of *Tar Baby* is to depict the clash between cultures and to shed light on the black character when being affected by the whites. Therefore, if any researcher wants to base his comparative study on those two novels, certainly he is going to find other similarities and other differences between the two works

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