

Toni Morrison. *Jazz*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) 229 pp., \$21.00.

Francis Davis, writing about jazz in the *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1988, p. 71), defined it as “a protean music with a sense of manifest destiny.” I personally feel this definition may be well used to accurately describe Morrison’s latest fiction. Stylistically and structurally it is a masterpiece, for mood and mode match. The stories about its main characters are told in the book’s sections, and yet the sections are interwoven because of the interrelationships of these characters. In each such section time past and present are also interwoven in a “seamless” way. The lyricism of many of the passages spoken by the fiction’s personae allows for these appropriate changes from character to character, to telling persona and back again. This reader was not lost, for as the stories progressed, I sensed the direction the passages were heading and the destinies toward which “the actors” were manifestly heading.

The stories of Violet and Joe Trace are told in the manner above, following their fortunes in Virginia and later in Harlem. Interspersed with present actions are personal and historic flashbacks. The action departs from the scene at the opening where Violet attempts to mar the corpse of Dorcas with whom Joe had fallen in love. The artistry of Morrison aids us to react, think, and feel as each character. The creator of the fiction never obtrudes upon the scene.

As both critics Wendy Steiner and Edna O’Brien have suggested, the author has made “resonant” the “black experience” but has also transcended what might incorrectly be inferred as a limitation by creating a human fiction which all peoples may sense completely.

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Patricia Morton. *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women*. (New York: Praeger, 1991) 173 pp., \$45.00 cloth.

Historical studies with regard to the history of African descendents have recently evinced new efforts to dig deeper into the understanding of African peoples. These concerns are focused generally toward presenting an ethnographic interpretation of the African American community from the viewpoint of men. However, few have been produced that have advanced similar ethnographic perspectives regarding African American women from a female perspective.

Morton has postured and presented a more than adequate perspective on the forces and institutions, both in ideas and practice, that play and continue to contribute significantly to the image of African American women. The author examines historical attitudes that reflect and magnify the injustices and inequities visible in the Western social order. With a careful method, Morton relates the racism and sexism dominated concerns extant in social practices that exist to create myths that serve to vilify the role and image of African American women.