

The Implications of Guitar's Ethical Choices in *Song of Solomon*

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Abstract

Critics of Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* focus mainly on the novel's hero, Milkman, Aunt Pilate, and Milkman's father, Macon. Guitar, another character in the novel, has received little attention from critics. From the perspective of ethical literary criticism, Guitar is a character with ethical implications. This study analyzes two major ethical choices made by Guitar and the enlightenment obtained from them. Guitar's first major ethical choice, driven by radical black nationalist sentiments, is his violent counterattack against white people. His second significant choice, driven by free and irrational will, is the killing of his best friend. Guitar evolves from a nationalist who thinks he loves black folk to an ethical criminal who kills his best friend. His two major ethical choices have profound moral connotations. Morrison, with her usual detached narration, presents the ethical tragedy of Guitar, guiding readers to reflect on blacks' strategy of pursuing racial justice through retaliatory violence against whites, and extending readers' focus from inter-racial violence to intra-racial violence. It can be said that this novel transcends race and expresses Morrison's reflections and worries about the moral situation of black people and even that of the entire human race.

Keywords: *Song of Solomon*, guitar, ethical literary criticism, ethical choice

1. Introduction

Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize winner, creates a male protagonist for the first time in *Song of Solomon*. The male protagonist is Milkman, a black playboy. The novel tells the story of Milkman, who, driven by materialism, goes south in search of gold but accidentally obtains the history of his ancestors and the traditional spiritual wealth of black people. Since the novel was published in 1977, it has received considerable academic attention. Katy Ryan draws on

the concept of “revolutionary suicide” proposed by Huey Newton, the leader of the Black Panther Party, and thinks that Milkman’s leap at the end of the novel is a form of revolutionary suicide. According to Newton, revolutionary suicide expresses not a wish to die but a determination to change the status quo (Ryan, 2000, pp. 389-412). Doreatha Drummond Mbalia believes that Milkman’s development of race and class consciousness is the premise for his change in attitude towards women (Mbalia, 2004, pp. 53-68). In other words, Milkman must integrate into the black community and be fully conscious of the plight of the black underclass before he learns to be considerate and kind to black women. So far, critics mainly focus on Milkman, Aunt Pilate, and Macon, but they make few comments on Guitar, another character in the novel. In *James Baldwin and Toni Morrison: Comparative Critical and Theoretical Essays*, D. Quentin Miller introduces Staggerlee, a black man who is neither good nor evil. Staggerlee is a black folktale character who, according to the legend, shoots his acquaintance Billy in a bar after Billy grabs his hat. The murder is immortalized through oral stories and blues songs, and Staggerlee is always associated with black militancy. According to Miller, Staggerlee “is bad in his lawlessness and his will to commit cold-blooded murder, but perhaps good insofar as his story can inspire rebellion against injustice” (Miller, 2006, p.121). In Miller’s view, “Staggerlee surfaces in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977) in the figure of Guitar, whom critics of this novel have frequently overlooked because of his disturbing implications” (Miller, 2006, p.122). Guitar is a character with ethical implications as he evolves from a radical black nationalist who violently counterattacks white people to an ethical criminal who murders his best friend. His two major ethical choices have profound implications. From the perspective of ethical literary criticism, this paper will analyze Guitar’s two ethical choices

and their implications, as well as the ethical enlightenment that the novel brings to readers.

In China, ethical literary criticism (*wen xue lun li xue pi ping*), proposed by Professor Nie Zhenzhao, is a research method that “reads, interprets, and analyzes literature from an ethical perspective” (Nie, 2015, p.83). According to ethical literary criticism, literature stems from mankind’s desire to share moral experiences and the need for ethical expression. Moral education is the basic function of literature, while aesthetics is just a way to realize the didactic function of literature. In other words, the ultimate purpose of reading and appreciating literary works is to receive moral education. Ethical literary criticism “emphasizes ‘historicism’, that is, the examination of the ethical values in a given work with reference to a particular historical context or a period of time in which the text under discussion is written” (Nie, 2015, p.84). As a result, critics should objectively analyze the various phenomena in literature from the historical point of view, instead of interpreting the literary works produced in the past in terms of present-day ethics. Ethical literary criticism has its own conceptual system, including concepts such as ethical choice, ethical identity, the Sphinx factor, the human factor and animal factor, etc. Nie makes a distinction between ethical choice and ethical selection. According to him, ethical selection is the basic theory of ethical literary criticism, whereas ethical choice is the core concept. He draws on Charles Darwin’s notion of natural selection, which accounts for humankind’s physical forms, and proposes his own theory of ethical selection: according to him, natural selection—the transition from apes to humans—is the first step taken by mankind, and the result is the acquisition of human beings’ physical forms. However, while humankind is physically distinct from other animals, he is not fundamentally different. To be truly different from other animals in essence, humankind must take the second step, which is

the stage of ethical selection, and the result is the acquisition of human essence. Ethical selection is the process of moral perfection for human beings, and teaching is the method used in this process. As far as individuals are concerned, Nie believes that one's whole life from birth to death is also a process of ethical selection, which is composed of countless specific ethical choices: "People always live in the process of ethical selection, and ethical choices are being made all the time" (Nie, 2022, p.22). According to ethical literary criticism, literature describes specific choices over the course of one's life. Thus, ethical choices are the core component of literary works, and literary studies should focus on their analysis. By analyzing specific ethical choices, readers can better understand the characters in literary works and obtain moral teachings from their life experiences.

From the perspective of ethical literary criticism, *Song of Solomon* is an ethical tragedy with rich connotations. Nie thinks that "there always exists one or more ethical lines in a literary text" (Nie, 2015, p.92). In the novel, Milkman's spiritual transformation is the principal ethical line. Along this line, several important choices by Milkman, such as searching for gold in the South, tracking his family's history, and identifying with Black culture, highlight the line's upward trend. This shows that Milkman has changed from an old Milkman who is deeply poisoned by materialism and lacks a sense of responsibility, to a new Milkman who is introspective and considerate of others. Echoing the principal ethical line is the ethical subline, which is the evolution of Guitar's personality. This ethical subline serves as a foil to the principal one. Along this subline, Guitar's two major ethical choices lead to the line's downward trend. Guitar, a radical man who believes he loves black people, gradually transforms into an ethical criminal who murders his best friend. In this sense, Guitar's tragic

story is thought-provoking. Morrison, with her usual detachment, presents the tragedy of Guitar in a narrative that seems unsentimental and expresses her ethical reflection on the violent counterattacks of black people as well as chronic violence within the black community.

2. Violent Counterattack: Guitar's First Major Ethical Choice Driven by Radical Black Nationalist Sentiment

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Haley, the author, records what Malcolm says, "They called me 'the angriest Negro in America.' I wouldn't deny that charge ... I am not for wanton violence, I am for justice" (Haley, 1984, p.366). Guitar, who glorifies violence, can be described as the Malcolm X in *Song of Solomon*. In the novel, Milkman, in a mocking tone, asks Guitar why he does not change his name to Guitar X. Joining the Seven Days to kill white people is Guitar's first major ethical choice. The Seven Days is a black revolutionary organization in the 1920s whose mission is to take bloody revenge on whites. The blacks who join this organization believe that their violent acts are motivated by a strong love for black people. As Guitar says to Milkman, "What I'm doing ain't about hating white people. It's about loving us. About loving you. My whole life is love" (Morrison, 2004, p.159). He kills white people because he believes that he loves black folk. Guitar's argument is a moral paradox, resulting in a moral dilemma in which good and evil go hand-in-hand.

One of the backgrounds of the novel is the notorious lynching of Emmett Till. The young Guitar participates in a debate of several blacks over the lynching of Emmett Till at Tommy's Barbershop. Morrison attacks the miscarriages of justice at that time through Guitar's words, "Ain't no law for no colored man except the one sends him to the chair" (Morrison, 2004, p.82). Miscarriages of justice against blacks are reflected earlier in *Iola Leroy*, Frances

E.W. Harper's novel, which depicts the Civil War and Reconstruction. In the novel, Robert shows the unfairness of the U.S. judicial system by saying, "But while a white man is stealing a thousand dollars, a black man is getting into trouble taking a few chickens" (Harper, 1892, p. 170). In *Song of Solomon*, Guitar explains the justifiability of the Seven Days in this way: "If there was anything like or near justice or courts when a cracker kills a Negro, there wouldn't have to be no Seven Days" (Morrison, 2004, 160).

Guitar, in this novel, is the embodiment of millions of black men who face the age-old dilemma of ethical identity, and the constant tension between American and black identities causes them to suffer from double consciousness. According to ethical literary criticism, "identities, whether they are the ones in society, family, or school, etc., they are all ethical identities" (Nie, 2014, p.265) and ethical problems are usually related to ethical identities. Furthermore, Nie believes that if ethical literary criticism is used to analyze literary works, it is very important to find ethical lines and ethical knots in them. "Ethical knots are the concentrated representation of contradictions and conflicts in literary works" (Nie, 2014, p.258). "Along the ethical lines, there are a set of ethical knots or ethical complexes. Specifically, ethical lines can be seen as the vertical axis of the text, while ethical knots can be regarded as the horizontal axis. Combined together, ethical lines and ethical knots contribute to building up the ethical web of the text" (Nie, 2015, p. 92). In the novel, the ethical knot manifests as Guitar's facing the tension between American and black identities. When Guitar eventually identifies himself as black only, he chooses tit-for-tat violent revenge in the pursuit of racial justice.

According to Jerry H. Bryant, "*Song of Solomon* contains arguments about the

legitimacy and practicality of retaliatory violence” (Bryant, 1997, 291). Donn C. Worgs also points out that the justification of retaliatory violence and the rage of black people, along with their longing for retribution, are recurring themes in black artistic works. (Worgs, 2006, pp. 20-45) In the novel, Morrison skillfully uses an impersonal narrative to draw readers’ attention to the retaliatory violence of blacks through an argument between Milkman and Guitar in Mary’s Place. Regarding the legitimacy of retaliatory violence, Morrison invites readers to make their own judgments. However, in her seeming detachment, Morrison’s ethical attitude somehow reveals itself. After Guitar makes a good excuse for the violence of Seven Days, Milkman’s remarks hit the nail on the head, “What you’re doing is crazy. And something else: it’s a habit. If you do it enough, you can do it to anybody. You know what I mean? A torpedo is a torpedo, I don’t care what his reasons. You can off anybody you don’t like. You can off me” (Morrison, 2004, pp.160-161). Here, Morrison foreshadows Guitar’s second major ethical choice of murdering his best friend through the meaningful words of Milkman. And Guitar’s response — “We don’t off Negroes.” (Morrison, 2004, p.161)—creates tension and irony with his later ethical choice to kill Milkman. Here, we can faintly see Morrison’s concern about the degradation of those black people who, like Guitar, support retaliatory violence and hope to defend racial interests through violence, as well as her appeal to black people to fight for justice through practical wisdom.

By what means should black people pursue justice? This is an ethical dilemma faced by all black people. This dilemma sets Dr. King and Malcolm on different paths in their pursuit of justice during the Civil Rights Movement. When Dr. King centered his theories on love and non-violence and led the black people to an initial victory against racism and segregation in

the South, Malcolm ridiculed Dr. King and called on blacks to fight back violently against whites. This age-old dilemma also caused the non-violent resistance tactics of the Civil Rights Movement to degenerate into violent counterattacks and race riots in later years. The Seven Days in the novel is founded in the 1920s, more than three decades earlier than the Civil Rights Movement. In its members' vengeful minds, they view all whites as potential lynchers and take violent revenge. The reversal of the subject and object of violence creates a black version of the Ku Klux Klan. If the act of Seven Days is out of love for black people, this irrational love further causes personality distortion as well as psychological crises among its members. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, Smith commits suicide because he cannot bear the psychological pressure brought about by the indiscriminate killing of white people. Potter, another member of Seven Days, rambles in his speech in a drunken frenzy. Guitar's later homicidal behavior increasingly deviates from his original intention of love. All these show that those blacks who favor violence cannot find the right way to pursue racial justice and gradually become irrational. Aristotle says in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, "The work of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with moral virtue; for virtue makes the goal correct, and practical wisdom makes what leads to it correct" (Aristotle, 2009, p.115). Similarly, Morrison also raises the question of the relationship between ends and means through the violence of Seven Days. She aims to pose the following question to readers: Can black people seek a kind of racial justice that goes beyond revenge?

3. Killing His Best Friend: Guitar's Second Major Ethical Choice Driven by Free Will and Irrational Will

"The class differences between Milkman and Guitar are made obvious by Morrison

early in the novel” (Story, 1989, p.153). The unbridgeable class gap between them is a presumed ethical knot—a conflict that exists at the beginning of the novel. However, the conflict reflected in this ethical knot is covered by their friendship. Morrison does not provide a detailed description of Guitar when he first appears in the novel. What readers get from the brief description is that of a naive country boy who has just arrived in a northern city from the South. Morrison describes a pure friendship between the two teenagers in a cheerful tone. Guitar guides Milkman’s road to awakening, inadvertently acting as a cultural guide. It is Guitar who leads Milkman to Pilate’s house, so Milkman can observe how the black underclass relieve their sorrow through folk songs, and for the first time, Milkman becomes aware of the hardships of poor black people. It is also because of his friendship with Guitar that Milkman can cross the class divide and go to the ramshackle black ghetto in Southside from his own mansion on Not-Doctor Street. Milkman’s contact with the black underclass lays the spiritual foundation for his cultural return on his later trip to the South. When Milkman is ostracized in the black ghetto because of his family background, Guitar also protects him. Pure friendship brings comfort and pleasure to both boys. But, in a more rigorous sense, their friendship is more of what Aristotle would call the “friendship because of pleasure” (Aristotle, 2009, p.146). In Aristotle’s view, this type of friendship occurs mostly among young people happy to interact with each other. In it, there is a close affinity, but camaraderie vanishes as soon as one fails to bring pleasure to the other. So, the friendship is less intense in the one “because of pleasure” and friends of this type lack similar beliefs and values, let alone similar virtues. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why Milkman and Guitar can rashly team up to steal a sack of gold from Pilate’s house, or why Guitar fails to instill hatred for white people in Milkman. This

fragile friendship even foreshadows Guitar's murder of Milkman.

As they grow older, their friendship based on pleasure continues to bridge the class gap. Guitar is precocious and wise, and what he says to Milkman is always correct. He once points out that Milkman is not a serious person, implying that Milkman is shallow. To some extent, his comment points to a common weakness among affluent black children. When Milkman is troubled by the discord between his parents, Guitar tells Milkman, "Try to understand it, but if you can't, just forget it and keep yourself strong, man" (Morrison, 2004, p.88). When Milkman expresses disgust at his nickname, Guitar tells Milkman, "Let me tell you somethin, baby. Niggers get their names the way they get everything else—the best way they can. The best way they can" (Morrison, 2004, p.88). It can be seen that when Milkman is confined to family disputes and personal troubles, Guitar always encourages him to shift his focus from personal plight to the survival plight of black people.

As a poor black man who has experienced hardships in life, Guitar has a deeper understanding of black underclass' misery than Milkman. When Guitar is a teenager, his family almost ends up on the street because his grandmother cannot pay the rent. Macon's rude rejection of the request by Guitar's grandmother to defer rent payments is the first manifestation of class antagonism between the Milkman and Guitar families. Thus, readers cannot help but feel a touch of compassion for this "cat-eyed boy" (Morrison, 2004, p.7). The trauma during Guitar's childhood is reflected in the image of sugar. Morrison reveals Guitar's trauma through the detail that sweets make him sick. In Guitar's memory, the tragic death of his father in the factory is dramatically presented in scenes of the white boss's benevolent condolences and little Guitar's aversion to peppermint sticks at his father's funeral. The white boss copes with the

tragic death of Guitar's father with a consolation payment of forty dollars and a big sack of candies and then evades insurance liabilities, which are all remembered by little Guitar, who is sensible at an early age. As a result, little Guitar hates the white boss and has an aversion to the candies given by him, and to the peppermint sticks his mother buys with the consolation money. Sugar is a symbol of the sweetness of life, but here, it becomes a stimulus that causes Guitar's intense physical and mental reactions, bringing back his memories of his father being cut in half. Guitar's vomiting reaction to sweet food is PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Recurring flashbacks of this traumatic childhood event haunt him and fuel his hatred towards white people. In addition, the humble expression of Guitar's mother, who dares not hate the white boss but expresses gratitude to him, further arouses Guitar's desire for revenge against white people.

The class antagonism between Guitar and Milkman is again demonstrated during a conversation along Tenth Street. In the conversation, Guitar thinks Milkman and his rich black friends often indulge in worldly pleasure, and he says that if he is invited to a party on Honoré Island frequented by Milkman and his rich black friends, his only option would be to bring "a case of dynamite and a book of matches"⁷⁽¹⁰³⁾ with him. In a sense, there is some truth in what Guitar says about middle-class black children, but his hatred towards the affluent black middle class also lurks in his words. The class antagonism between Milkman and Guitar is not just about where they live and their family wealth, but, more importantly, about their attitudes towards white people. Macon, Milkman's father, regards gaining recognition in white society as a means of making a fortune. Although Milkman finally denies the materialism of his father through the journey of searching for his family roots, he still inherits the gentle attitude of rich

blacks towards whites. Milkman is superficial and naïve before his trip to the South, but he always has a rational view of whites. He thinks that “some whites made sacrifices for Negroes” (Morrison, 2004, p.156), and there are a lot of nice white people. After the trip to the South, although Milkman integrates into the black community and understands the plight of black people through the acquisition of his family’s history, he never hates all whites for the tragic fate of his ancestors and the entire black race. His mildness in acknowledging that there are good white people contrasts sharply with Guitar’s hatred for all white people. Their class antagonism and clash of ideas later become the driving force for Guitar to hunt and kill Milkman.

However, there is no trace of such black rage fueled by trauma and poverty in Pilate, a Messianic figure. Before Pilate begins her wandering life, she experiences the tragedy of her father being shot by a white man; however, her ethical choice is still to love all. As Emily Paige Anderson puts it, “She acts as a Christ figure in the novel sacrificing herself to teach Milkman and Guitar about love”(Anderson, 2018, p.14). Driven by love, Pilate returns to the cave, picks up the remains of the white man killed by her brother, and carries them year-round as a sign of repentance. Years later, it turns out that the remains are those of Pilate’s father. Love also motivates Pilate to return good for evil, grovelling in front of the white police officer to plead for Milkman and Guitar who want to steal gold from her house. Pilate loves everyone equally, and this love is the sublimated moral emotion. Ethical literary criticism divides emotion into rational and irrational types. “Rational emotion is the moral one, while irrational emotion is the natural one” (Nie, 2014, p.250). By virtue of the power of moral emotion, Pilate, who is a member of the black underclass, loves others as herself, so she not only surpasses the dilemma

of ethical identity in which Guitar is caught, but also breaks down the barrier of hostility caused by class antagonism within the black race.

It is not that there is no moral emotion of love in Guitar. What causes Guitar's personality change is the struggle between the human factor and the animal factor as well as their ebb and flow. According to ethical literary criticism, the human factor and the animal factor together form the Sphinx factor. The Sphinx is an image of Greek mythology with a woman's head and a lion's body. Nie believes that the Sphinx vividly interprets human characteristics, with the human head representing rationality and the lion body representing the animal instinct left over during human evolution; he calls the co-existence of rationality and animality in human beings the Sphinx factor, in which the human factor reflects human rationality, while the animal factor reflects the animal instinct of man. In Nie's opinion, the human factor is the leading factor and can normally control and restrain the animal factor, so that humans become ethical. Nie believes that each person is a Sphinx factor because goodness and evil coexist in one person. "Different combinations and changes of the Sphinx factor will lead to different behavioral characteristics and personalities of the characters in literary works" (Nie, 2011, p.6). When Guitar's human factor prevails, he is Milkman's best friend, and with a few words, he always enlightens Milkman, who is trapped in personal troubles. When Guitar's animal factor prevails, Guitar hunts and kills Milkman mercilessly. According to ethical literary criticism, rational will is a will representing the human factor. This will is "the manifestation that human reason is at work, and is mainly used to inhibit or restrain free will" (Nie, 2014, p.253). Free will and irrational will are the wills representing the animal factor. There is a distinction between free and irrational wills. "Free will comes from the animal instinct of man,

which is mainly manifested in the different desires of man” (Nie, 2011, p.8), while irrational will arises “not from instinct, but from misjudgement or the desire to commit a crime” (Nie, 2011, p.13). In Guitar’s ethical choice to kill Milkman, Guitar’s free will breaks away from the constraint of rational will, while at the same time Guitar is driven by his irrational will, so he kills his best friend without hesitation. On one hand, in Guitar’s plan of retaliatory violence, with the gold, he can buy explosives to kill whites on a larger scale, so the desire for gold swells Guitar’s free will. On the other hand, the irrational will arising from misjudgement also drives Guitar to commit crimes. For Guitar, there are two kinds of misjudgements about Milkman. First, Guitar misunderstands Milkman from a series of coincidences, assuming that Milkman wants to keep all the wealth to himself after he gets the gold, so he has a murderous hatred of Milkman. Guitar is used to killing people at random, a habit that is developed from the repeated killings of white people. Second, Guitar’s misunderstanding of Milkman is mixed with hostility caused by class antagonism. This hostility stems from the subconscious prejudice of the black underclass against the black middle class. The sack of gold is probably a good excuse for Guitar to murder Milkman. By speculating that Milkman hides the gold, Guitar shifts his hatred of white people to his middle-class black friend. Morrison does not give much detail about how Guitar tracks Milkman, or even less about Guitar’s inner world; instead, she leaves it to the readers’ imagination. Readers are tempted to ask the following questions: Have there ever been battles between rational and irrational wills in Guitar’s mind? Has there ever been a conflict between his conscience and desires? Has Guitar ever experienced ethical anxiety because he is going to kill his best friend? Readers are stimulated to interpret the text and fill in blank spots in the narrative. Anyway, when Guitar ties the wire tightly around Milkman’s neck, or when

Guitar says to Milkman, “I will run you as long as there is ground” (Morrison, 2004, p.297), the cruel personality of Guitar has been fully revealed. If Guitar’s first major ethical choice is a radical move toward retaliatory violence, his second major ethical choice of killing his best friend indicates that he is on the wrong track.

4. Ethical Reflection and Moral Warning

“Literature is the expression of social ethics in a given historical period”(Nie, 2014, p.248), which conveys the writer’s ethical reflection on various problems in a certain historical context. In 1977, the year the novel was published, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements had already emerged, turning American society upside down. Dr. King led the nonviolent civil rights movement in the 1950s with some success, forcing the U.S. Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. However, Blacks were disappointed to find that they still suffered from unemployment and poverty. Moreover, civil rights activists were constantly threatened with violence by white racists. In despair, some radical blacks became advocates for Black Power. Although radical blacks denied that the Black Power slogan was reverse racism, arguing that they were merely advocating black self-determination, waves of urban race riots broke out in the U.S. from the mid-to-late 1960s to the early 1970s, driven by the Black Power slogan. Morrison’s *Seven Days* began in the 1920s, which was the embryonic form of radical black nationalism. The logic behind retaliatory violence is that radical Blacks see themselves as victims of white racist violence. As Bryant puts it, “In the most morally simplified cases, white violence against blacks produces a victim, black violence against whites a hero” (Bryant,1997, pp.2-3). Morrison urges readers to ponder the following questions: Are Guitar and the *Seven Days* black heroes? If it is denied that black-

on-white violence is bound to produce heroes, how can the nobility of ends and the wisdom of means be better reconciled in the black pursuit of justice?

Guitar's violent resistance strategy reflects the imbalance between value rationality and instrumental rationality in modern society. Value rationality pursues adherence to values and beliefs, whereas instrumental rationality pursues the means to maximize the effect. Although Max Weber uses this rational dichotomy to analyze the formation and development of capitalism, from *Seven Days* in the novel to the violent counter-attack strategy of the Black Power Movement in reality, we can also see the expansion of instrumental rationality and the shrinkage of value rationality, as is highlighted by Weber. Radical blacks use violence to maximize fairness in the short term. In Guitar's mind, there is only the rational calculation to maintain a balanced racial ratio. It never occurs to him whether the means of killing white people indiscriminately are morally incorrect. In violent resistance, the pursuit of racial justice degenerates into an act of wick.

With the plot of Guitar murdering Milkman, Morrison extends readers' focus from inter-racial violence to intra-racial violence. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), a play by August Wilson, is also a classic portrayal of intra-racial violence. When white people close the door of opportunities to Levee, the hero of the play, he vents his anger on his black band mate, who accidentally steps on his new shoe, and degenerates into a murderer of his fellow man. Like Guitar, Levee also experiences the family tragedy of his father's death during his childhood. For both, the cruelty of their behaviors results from their twisted psychology of clinging to past trauma. Not coincidentally, both Morrison and Wilson explore intra-racial violence, which shows that violence is widespread within the black race. Compared with

Wilson, Morrison analyzes this social evil more profoundly, exposing not only violence among blacks, but also the hostility and killings caused by stratification within the black race. Guitar hates white people and then shifts this hatred toward the black middle class. Having great hatred, he turns his gun on his best friend and vents his fury. Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation*, categorizes tragedies into three types. The first type of tragedy is the misfortune caused by the characters' extraordinary evil. The second type is misfortune caused by chance or error. The third type is more profound to Schopenhauer, as "it shows us the greatest misfortune not as an exception, not as something brought about by rare circumstances or monstrous characters, but rather as something that develops effortlessly and spontaneously out of people's deeds and characters" (Schopenhauer, 2010, p.282). This effortless and spontaneous evil in Guitar, catalyzed by the hostility brought about by stratification among blacks, leads to the tragedy of the ethical crime in which Guitar kills his best friend. Viewed in this light, *Song of Solomon* transcends race and expresses Morrison's reflections and worries about the moral situation of black people and even that of the entire human race.

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