

THE HYSTERIC FEMALES: A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO ANALYSE  
FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE SELECTED NOVELS BY TONI MORRISON

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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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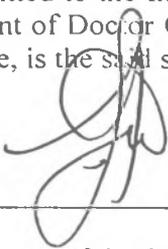
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This academic journey in the research, preparation and writing my PhD thesis has been a most challenging one. However, I have been blessed by the many people who have travelled with me, walked beside me and reached out to assist, in ways big and small, to ensure the completion of this journey. Therefore, it is with much gratitude that I thank my supervisor, Dr. Lajiman Janoory for his support, patience and encouragement over the past three years. I am greatly thankful for his insightful supervision, which opened my eyes to several aspects of academic research that enhanced the quality of my work. I am also indebted to University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, in particular the Department of English Language and Literature for giving me the opportunity to achieve my academic goal.

I also wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to my husband, Abdul Rahman and my three daughters, Ala'a, Riyam, and Ghufuran for their unconditional love, understanding and encouragement which gave me the inspiration and determination to successfully complete what has been a very demanding but rewarding task.  
May Allah bless you all.



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## ABSTRACT

Hysteria was a phenomenon commonly portrayed in the twentieth century's literature, and for its importance, it needs to be discussed in the current context. In this research, I argue that patriarchal, physical, and sexual violation are the causes of a psychological disorder that weakens females' personality that may lead to hysteria among them. Toni Morrison is a post-modern feminist contemporary writer, whose work focuses on the problems of slavery and women. In her *Paradise, A Mercy, The Bluest Eye, and Beloved*, hysteria appears as a female character that symbolizes their problems and difficulties. This research aims to examine how females are pushed to be hysteric by family or society, how Toni Morrison depicts it, and how these female characters get rid of hysteria to help them live as ordinary human beings based on Kristeva's concept of abjection. In general, females are more reserved to express their feelings openly as males do, and as such, the former develop a hysteric body language to reflect what they could not articulate. Examining hysteria by using the psychoanalysis approach, namely Sigmund Freud's and Luce Irigaray's concepts of hysteria together with Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, helps highlight the causes of hysteria among women, how it influences females' lives, and how new identities are restructured through abjection. These hysterics rebel against suppression, degradation, and exploitation by using their bodies as the only means of expressing and restructuring their identities through abjection. Thus, this expressive subversion becomes a potent women's strategy to regain power. In this study, the researcher explored the causes of hysteria and its influences on females' lives and examined the impact of Kristeva's concept of abjection as a kind of remedy to help women to get rid of the stigmatization of hysteria, enabling them to live as normal human beings. The findings of this study can pave the way for other researchers to apply such concepts to other writers' works, especially those dealing with women's lives and their sufferings.



## WANITA HISTERIK: SATU PENDEKATAN PSIKOANALITIK DALAM MEMAHAMI WATAK-WATAK WANITA BERDASARKAN NOVEL- NOVEL TERPILIH TONI MORRISON

### ABSTRACT

Histeria merupakan satu fenomena yang kerap di paparkan dalam sastera dalam abad kedua puluh. Memandangkan ianya penting, ia perlu di bincangkan dalam konteks semasa. Dalam kajian ini, saya menghujahkan bahawa pencabulan secara seksual, kebapaan, dan fizikal adalah merupakan punca utama kecelaruan psikologi yang melemahkan personaliti kaum wanita yang boleh mencetuskan histeria dalam kalangan mereka. Toni Morrison adalah seorang penulis kontemporari wanita pasca-modern yang mana penulisannya menfokuskan terhadap permasalahan perhambaan dan wanita. Dalam karyanya bertajuk *Paradise, A Mercy, The Bluest Eye, and Beloved*, histeria muncul sebagai satu karakter wanita yang melambangkan gejala permasalahan dan kesusahan mereka. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana kaum wanita dibuat menjadi histeria oleh keluarga atau masyarakat, bagaimana Toni Morrison memperlihatkannya, dan bagaimana karakter wanita ini menyingkirkan histeria agar mereka dapat hidup seperti manusia biasa berdasarkan konsep kehinaan Kristeva. Dalam kajian ini, karakter histeria dikaji untuk mencabar kepercayaan yang dipegang oleh individu atau masyarakat mengenai kaum wanita yang boleh dengan mudahnya bertukar daripada seseorang yang normal kepada seseorang yang sukar dikawal secara rasional. Secara amnya, kaum wanita amat keberatan untuk menunjukkan perasaan mereka secara terbuka berbanding kaum lelaki; oleh yang demikian, mereka membina bahasa badan histeria untuk mencerminkan apa-apa yang mereka sukar mengartikulasikan. Penelitian terhadap histeria melalui penggunaan kaedah psikoanalisis, iaitu konsep histeria Sigmund Freud and Luce Irigaray serta konsep kehinaan Julia Kristeva, dapat menunjukkan punca-punca yang menyebabkan histeria, bagaimana ianya mempengaruhi kehidupan wanita, dan bagaimana identiti-identiti baru distrukturkan semula untuk menangani kehinaan. Mereka yang dilanda histeria memberontak terhadap penindasan, degradasi, dan eksploitasi dengan menggunakan badan mereka sebagai satu cara untuk memperlihatkan dan menstrukturkan semula identiti mereka dalam menangani penghinaan yang mereka alami sebelum ini. Maka, subversif ekspresi ini menjadi strategi utuh bagi kaum wanita untuk mengembalikan kuasa mereka. Dalam kajian ini, penyelidik mengkaji punca-punca histeria dan pengaruhnya terhadap kehidupan wanita dan meneliti impak konsep kehinaan Kristeva sebagai satu jenis penawar untuk menyingkirkan stigma histeria agar mereka dapat hidup sebagai manusia biasa. Dapatan kajian ini dapat menyediakan jalan untuk lain-lain penyelidik untuk mengaplikasikan konsep-konsep berkenaan dalam karya-karya penulis lain, terutamanya yang berkaitan dengan kehidupan dan kesengsaraan wanita.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter, as an introduction to the thesis provides the Background of the Study which is “The Hysterical Females: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Understanding the Selected Novels by Toni Morrison”. Following the Background of the Study, the Evolution of Concept of Hysteria is discussed and then an Introduction to Toni Morrison is stated before the Statement of the Problems is identified. The Research Objectives are then introduced and the Research Questions formulated. Theoretical Framework is identified and Significance of the Study is stated and elaborated before the Scope and Limitations of the Study are determined. The Definition of the Key Terms used in this study are then defined, and ending with a Chapter containing the Conclusion. The Background of the Study begins in the next section after this



## Introduction Section

### 1.2 Background of the Study

Psychoanalysis is a theory which emerged in 20<sup>th</sup> century and based on the perspectives of the Austrian theorist Sigmund Freud of unconscious and dreams and their responsibility of human behaviour. "the notion that human beings are motivated, even driven, by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware"(Tyson,2006,p:14-15). The unconscious is considered as Freudian most important contribution to psychoanalysis, and it is connected with the idea of repression which is a cover for the unconscious traumas and desires, therefore, the symptoms reveal the repressed unconscious. Freud use psychoanalysis to treat his patients by encouraging them to talk about their symptoms and to identify what was on their mind. He believes that the unconscious, which is a part in the mind, is the storeroom for hidden emotions, desires, fears, and ambitions. (Tyson.2006). Freud first used psychoanalysis as a medical treatment for patients who suffer from neurosis but it was spread very quickly to other fields like religion, mythology, warfare, and literature.

In literature, psychoanalysis is one of the critical approaches which help readers to interpret literary texts by interpreting its content to unravel the hidden meaning by analysing characters' behaviours, words, actions and symbolism. Psychological criticism consider the literary text as fictional form to explain the author's personality and the state of his mind. Thus, psychological interpretation considered one of the techniques to identify the hidden meaning of a literary work (Tyson.2006) . It also helps

to study the writer's unconscious and how it influence his writings, in addition to study the characters who exist in the literary work, "Psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual's overt actions" (p: 316). Moreover, psychoanalysis is a wide domain in which many concepts developed as hysteria, which has developed mainly from Freud to Irigaray. Psychoanalysis is the best approach to be used to examine concepts like hysteria which trace the development of subjectivity. This study focus on the psychology of women's subjectivity, thus Freudian psychoanalysis theory is applied in it.

Hysteria is a psychoanalytic concept that is invariably applied to analyse the unusual psychological disorders that are associated with behavioural traits. In the traditional sense, the concept of hysteria refers to the extreme negative emotions, such as fright and anger which cannot be controlled easily. Freud is considered the founder of the concept of hysteria. He put forth the early fundamental principles of the concept of hysteria. He depended on the experiments and studies conducted on a cohort of his patients. His studies led him to argue that the concept of hysteria is a psychic disorder that is manifested by, and perceived through the behavioural characteristics of people. Freud postulated that the idea of hysteria is linked to the psychic abnormalities that accompany the personality defects. As such, personality was the most tangible means used by Freud to enhance his later arguments about the concepts of hysteria. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Freud tested several of his patients in these experiments, the majority of them were females and he concluded that hysteria attacks people's behaviours that control their reactions with other people as well as their social interlocutor in their daily life. Therefore, hysteric psychic disorder came to be known as psychological abnormality connected with the previous memories of people.

Shortly after the publications of Freud's treatises on the development of hysteria, psychiatrists began to accentuate some ideas in relation to hysteria. The idea of hysteria spread in the world as a psychic disorder caused by the past reminiscences. These are considered as residuals that accumulate in persons' psyches. The psychic remembrances could lead to some abnormal defects in the psychic which, in turn, changes a person, causing the person to be different from who he/she was in the past. In the past, some persons used to be stable and normal. But when they become hysteric, they undergo a drastic and extensive transformation. The change is not produced in their unconscious psyches. It is produced in their actions and behaviours. Accordingly, hysteric people were distinguished by some abnormal behaviour. These behaviours include spasm, speech disorder, screams and so forth. When persons react to their surroundings with these psychological reactions, psychiatrists would conclude that these manifestations are indications of psychic disorder which is mainly hysteria (Trimble & Reynolds, 2016).

The implicit signs of hysteria denote the fact that it threatens the healthy state of the mind. Yet, the earlier attempts to scrutinise hysteria as a psychic malady aimed to trace hysteria in females' psyches. Moreover, Critics have identified the causes and effects of hysteria on the intrinsic structure of people's psyche. Hysteria, at that time, was greatly associated with females and how their behaviours fell into severe detrimental disorder (Trimble and Reynolds, 2016). As such, hysteria began as a psychic destructive phenomenon revealing the complications of female's psychic disorder. On the other hand, Stone (2016) traces the evolution of the concept of hysteria and contends that the concept of hysteria is of Greek origin, and the Greeks' credited

to coining the implicative sense of the concept. This is because during the Greek civilization, they referred to the concept as “hystera” (p.37) before it acquired its ultimate shape in modern, or Freudian, appropriation of the concept.

In *The newly born woman*, Cixous (1986) also has claimed that the “female malady is a real style of expressing feminine identity” (p.347) and this is clearly shown in observing minutely that hysteria is a kind of female language that opposes the rigid structures of male discourse and thought patterns. The hysteric characters lost the ability to speak as if their tongues are cut off and conversely the bodies are doing the talking, where the men are incapable of hearing and this is very clear in the case of Sethe, Sorrow, Mavis, Florens and Pecola, the protagonists in the selected novels in this research, who are mute and silence and cannot speak. Therefore, this study aims to trace hysteria so that we can identify the reasons which breed hysteria in these characters and the influence of hysteria in their lives, can hysteric females have normal life through abjection or they can’t. Moreover, by examining the possibility of abjection to act as active means which female use to reconstruct their identities, this will put end to the idea that hysteria is incurable and that hysteric females have to go on their living as weak, passive and submissive characters.

The next section will be an overview on the evolution of the concept of hysteria due to its importance as the core focus of this study in relation to the selected novels of Toni Morrison.

### 1.3 Evolution of Concept of Hysteria

At the beginning of its appearance, hysteria was considered as a disease which inflicted women only. The origin of hysteria as a disease is very old as the physicians during Pharos of Egypt believe that the movement of the womb as the only reason which disturb women live. This belief continue till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the Greece physician Hippocrates (460-377 BC) diagnosed hysteria as a disease result from movement of womb and it is connected with sexuality. Hysteria also can be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Plato claimed that when women suppressed their desire to a particular time, their womb becomes angry and starts moving through the body caused suffocation and breathing difficulties (Wald 28).

The origin of the term hysteria is a Greek word (hustera) which indicates the uterus. That is why it is related to women. As a term hysteria can be defined according to the *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Akhtar, 2018). refers to a “character type and to a group of psychoneurotic symptom formation. Its manifestations dramatic, physical and affective could be considered as a way to reveal and symbolize a psychosexual conflict and, at the same time to defend against acknowledging that conflict” (Akhtar, p: 72). For a long time hysteria is understood as a disease affecting the body and therefore troubling the mind. Recently, professors and physicians defines the term hysteria as “an affliction of the mind that was expressed through a disturbance of the body” (Showalter 1997, 14).

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century hysteria spread to a large extent in French field (Showalter 1997). The French neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot (1829–1893) worked

hardly on hysteria and he analysed many cases of his patients. Charcot attributes hysteria to physical symptoms result from “a hereditary defect or traumatic wound in the central nervous system that gives rise to epileptiform attacks” (Showalter, p: 30). Charcot stated new reasons which lead to hysteria, and he diagnosed it as a neurological disease result from a physical shock which lead to hysteria. Therefore, according to Charcot’s perspectives, hysteria was portrayed as a problem affecting the nervous system which could be stimulated by a physical or emotional shock and this reveal the influence of Charcot on Freud because both of them accuse hysteria to trauma with symptoms like “pain, visual disturbances, stigmata, ovarian sensitivity, anaesthesia and convulsive fits” (Showalter, p:33). But it is clear that Charcot’s diagnosis differs from that of Freud as in his treatment he focus on the genital sites only, like putting some pressure ( like leather belt) on the female’s ovaries to treat his patients. This kind of treatment revealed his traditional views on the treatment of hysteria which led to the failure of his treatment. Thus Charcot’s only contribution to understand hysteria when he insist to consider it as organic disease and thus paved the way to Sigmund Freud who accused hysteria to problems in the nervous system.

Freud’s research on hysteria began in the nineteenth century *fin de siècle* when he proved his success and talent in his theories. His ideas on hysteria were developed primarily due to his treatment of the patients and the most famously cases of Anna O. and Dora in addition to his first well-known work *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895 which considered as the starting line of psychotherapy in general and of psychoanalysis especially (Michael, 2019).

Freud gives hysteria different interpretations. For Freud, repression and sexuality are the base of the hysterical character which acts as a defensive power accompanied by amnesia and dissociation. Moreover, Freud states that hysterical symptom is generally expressed as a conversion reaction.

As it is mentioned previously, Freud is considered the founder of the concept of hysteria. Freud put forth the early fundamental principles of the concept of hysteria. He depended on the experiments and studies conducted on a cohort of his patients. His studies led him to argue that the concept of hysteria is a psychic disorder that is manifested by, and perceived through the behavioural characteristics of people. Freud postulated that the idea of hysteria is linked to the psychic abnormalities that accompany the personality defects. As such, personality was the most tangible means used by Freud to enhance his later arguments about the concepts of hysteria. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Freud tested several of his patients in these experiments, the majority of them were females and he concluded that hysteria attacks people's behaviours that control their reactions with other people as well as their social interlocutor in their daily life. Therefore, hysteric psychic disorder came to be known as psychological abnormality connected with the previous memories of people.

Freud and other psychoanalysts argue that the concept of hysteria emanates from mental diseases. Such diseases might include madness. Madness formulates one ultimate shape of hysteria development phases (Scull, 2009). This entails persons becoming mad when the level of hysteria reaches its climax in the unconscious minds. Here, people act in whimsical movements that are not normal. In this context, other people would judge them as being mad.



This is because mad people do not know that they are mad. Their madness is decided by other normal people. Consequently, they become detached from reality. They lose touch with habitual life as other people. For this reason, psychiatrists begin to find suitable remedies for these psychic complications. The earliest attempts to heal hysteria were not through chemical treatment as the present day medical treatments. Instead, they were psychological, that is they endeavour to heal hysteria through psychic attempts rather than medical treatments. One of these attempts was speech therapy. By using speech therapy, psychiatrists could reach the essence of the patients' problems through helping them to remember the negative past experiences that make them to be hysteric. Therefore, this section briefly introduces the concept of hysteria in order for it to be comprehended before explaining it in the following sections.



Ávila and Terra (2012) observe hysteria and its changes (metamorphoses).

Hysteria does not have a single shape only. It has different shapes that are recognized as phases. These phases undergo some changes. The changes involved the transformation from one shape of hysteria into another shape according to the psychic conditions of hysteric people. Additionally, Ávila and Terra aim to pursue the hysterical development of the concept of hysteria and its discursive shapes in the current diagnostic strategies. They use a medical methodology to conduct their study. They examine hysteria by following the surgical, or clinical, and historical dilemmas that hinder the traditional and modern conceptualization of hysteria. Therefore, the subject of hysteria is tackled in terms of the historical aspects of the concept of hysteria. Ávila and Terra utilise some incidents to affirm their arguments about hysteria and how hysteria came to be used as a psychological concept via various instances in the study.



Ávila and Terra further claim that hysteria occupies a distinctive position in the medical history of psychiatry. Since the time of Hippocrates, hysteria is diagnosed through the observation of its development in the conditions, that help psychiatrists to locate the inherent conditions of hysteria. However, the concepts of hysteria had undergone radical changes since the beginning of the twentieth century. The investigations of hysteria had dwindled from the academic interests in the concept. At this point, Ávila and Terra scrutinize the classification of hysteria as a disease. Here, Ávila and Terra talk about hysteria as an organic illness. As I explained earlier, in the nineteenth century and even prior to that, people used to believe that hysteria is connected with women. This belief leads them to say that hysteria is organic, that is, it described the movement of the uterus inside the female's body. As a result of this movement, people concluded that hysteria is organic; it relates to the body organ (uterus) in the body that affects the psyches of women. However, this belief was eradicated since in the later phases of the nineteenth century. Ávila and Terra assert that during the 1990s, the concept of hysteria was almost removed from the classification of the organic diseases because it is a psychic one. They maintain that the concept of hysteria is associated with some psychic disorders, such as somatization disorder, anxiety and depression. These are mainly indications of the psychic features of hysteria. Because hysteria is a psychic disease, these psychic disorders result in different metamorphoses of hysteria in the psychotic persons. Yet, the inherent cause of these metamorphoses is still unnamed due to the new clinical treatments of hysteria as a disease. Accordingly, Ávila and Terra trace the historical origin of the concept of hysteria and its gradual conceptualization through different historical periods. The concept of hysteria changes according to its reflection of the patients' psychic cases.

Such cases are first used as symptoms of organic illnesses. However, in later periods, it is proved to be psychological rather than organic.

The concept of hysteria is not only restricted to adult people; it includes both adults and adolescent people. In this case, the concept of hysteria attacks the emotions and mentality of people whatever their age group. In addition to that, Sham *et al.* (2012) examine the cases of a number of school students who suffer from hysteria. Sham *et al.* claim that symptoms of hysteria appear in the study episodes when students are engaged in their study. The significance of Sham *et al.*'s study to this research is that hysteria is a kind of "disturbance" (p.565) that disrupt the normal lives of people. The current research will examine the selected works by Toni Morrison as aforementioned, where the characters suffer from psychic disturbances that hinder their normal lives. Certain of the characters lead an unusual life that is filled with problems which bring about hysteria to certain of characters. The research will, therefore, accentuate these problems and how they make the fictional characters' hysteric and how these characters try to get rid of the hysteric conditions.

Segal (2015) argues that hysteria comes out of physiological tributes. Consequently, hysteria is the psychic mirror that is reflected in the manifestation of the body conditions. Segal studies the ancient manifestations of hysteria that exemplifies the sex, age and time through the tangible surface of the body skin. Segal concludes that hysteria "embodies the external conditions of women's body in a world that is dominated by duty rather than heath" (p.74). As I have proposed in the previous paragraphs, hysteria is not only a psychic state, but also a physiological trait. North (2015) supports this claim. Hysteria is among different psychic disorders. One of these

disorders is “conversion disorder” which greatly resembles the physiological and neurotic disorders (p.53). North (2015) reinforces this idea that hysteria is a psychic disorder. North contends that hysteria is a psychic disorder because it is associated with other types of psychic disorders, such as mental disorders, conversion, borderline personality disorder, dissociation, somatization and the like. These disorders were tested by diagnosing the Briquet’s syndrome in psychically disordered persons. In this respect, North uses diagnostic comorbidity system to prove his arguments.

As for the relationship between hysteria and literature, it is very obvious in old literary texts as hysteria is closely associated with female’s bodies and most literary writings that involve women are invariably concerned with their sufferings in their societies. In Flaubert’s *Madam Bovary* (1856), Emma Bovary is a well-known case involving hysteria. Emma is a representation of a critical projection that focuses heavily on the hysterical manifestation of women. What identifies Emma’s condition is her state of isolation, which makes Flaubert’s literary representation very clear. Emma’s character is a clear portrayal of hysterical symptoms during that moment in times which, leads Emma to commit a suicide and end her life and suffering (Moran.2006). Furthermore, Moran (2006) states that the relationship of hysteria with literature is nothing new because hysteria has been included in many literary texts since the nineteenth century or more. In the Victorian novels, hysteria was considered as the feminine way to escape from masculine rule. Women who suffered from hysteria or mental anxiety were forced to display physical symptoms in order to identify their distress. This nineteenth century reading of hysteria is depicted in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) in which Mrs Bennet draws attention to her emotional disturbance in order to verify her disorder. In light of background on hysteria as aforementioned

above, it is appropriate at this stage to introduce Toni Morrison, whose selected novels will be examined in relation to hysteria afflicting her female characters and how they deal with it.

The next section will be a brief introduction about Toni Morrison who is widely acknowledged as one of the most dominant chroniclers of the African-American community, in particular pertaining the women.

#### 1.4 Introduction to Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison is a contemporary female writer of the time, whose writings are concerned with the problems that females face in their lives, particularly black females.

Most of her writing considered as a mirror which reflect the bitter reality that black females endure and by understanding her life will help to know the reasons which make most of her novels depict the deep psychological suffering of females in different times and places. Firstly, Morrison's real name was Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison and she changed it to a masculine one so that she would appear more powerful than with her real feminine name which represent female's inferiority in her society. Secondly, Morrison also takes man's role throughout her life because after her divorced, she is forced to live as a single and invisible woman with her two little sons and she portrays this bitter experience in her novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. Thus, most of her fictional characters based on her real life models or stories that happened during her parents' and grandparents' time. Thirdly, Morrison's family were forced to move from their city Ohio due to the racial discrimination they faced there which make most of her



writings depict the influence of racial segregation and slavery which enforced on black communities and this provide her fictional characters a certain contemporary relevance that has attracted the attention of many universities world wide (Tally, 2007). Additionally, the examination of Morrison's characters shed light on the horrible psychic anguish that women can face and endure in their lives, the double oppression in both the patriarchal and racial societies. Most of Morrison's heroines manifest hysterical symptoms such as muteness (aphasia), tendency to crying, shouting, killing, insanity, and other sexual or physical abnormal behaviours. In all her writings, Morrison aims to unravel the hardship that females carry on their shoulders in their live under the slavery and patriarchal system which led them to be hysteric to face these difficulties.



Additionally, Morrison's writings have contributed substantially to the establish of what is prevalently in current times known as African-American literature ( is the literature which produced in united states by writers of African descents) (Birch, 2016). Since her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and for four decades now. she has been writing about the black community, racism, slavery and oppression. Specifically, most of her novels dealt with black women and their duplicated suffering from both the family and society. Her novels are a stark depiction of how black women suffer for being black, slave and female, and in turn, how they are oppressed in their patriarchal society; they do not even have any rights just because they are black and female. as her novels portray the real sufferings of black people (Abu Jweid, *et al*, 2015). Morrison also elucidates the influence of slavery in their lives. Many of her novels incorporates this hazardous influence within and after slavery. She tells us the dilemma of being black and female. in addition to the struggles to live in the midst of





the abuse that they had face and endure in their lives. Thus, it can be clearly seen that not only in the novels selected for this study, but also in all her other novels, Morrison provides insights to the psychic destruction of females for no reason other than the color of their skin and their gender.

Some of Morrison's novels are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), and *God Help the Child* (2015) in addition to non-fictional writings. Through her works, Morrison has left a legacy of African-American literature which could be cited as fine postcolonial fiction. They provide readers with a comprehensive insightful view of the experiences of African Americans and their hardships. The narrative has conveyed the real events that happened in Morrison's life time. Additionally, they also project to us the internal conflicts of their fictional characters.

### 1.5 Statement of the Problem

Although there have been several scholarly works explaining and tracing hysteria in western literature, less attention has been paid to African-American female literature, specifically fiction. Hysteria was initially theorised and developed by Freud in collaboration with Breuer in their *Studies on Hysteria*, where Freud (1895) then undertook responsibility and developed hysteria in his *The Aetiology of Hysteria*. As a psychoanalytic disease, hysteria invaded fields like literature, culture and media. Charlotte Perkins' (1860-1935) *The Yellow Wall Paper* is one of the first fictional works



in which hysteria can be traced. Additionally, 20<sup>th</sup> century black women writers, such as Fay Weldon, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor to name a few, are clear instances in whose writings hysteria can be traced obviously, White and Middle Eastern writers such as Nawal Al Saadawi and Hanan Al Sheikh also mentioned this disease as a phenomenon attached to women, that curbs and obstructs their identity.

To the best knowledge of this research, there is hardly any research that analyses hysteria in Morrison's *Paradise*, *A Mercy*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Beloved*. Furthermore, there is scant research which explores hysteria through Freudian, Irigarayan and Kristevan readings all together in the selected novels. As such, the framework of the current study includes subverting hysteria as one of the many problems that affect women which leads to abjection and liberates their identities. Previous studies, have made a relatively significant contribution by exploring the female gendered roles which are affected by hysteria, mostly applying Freud's or Lacan's theory separately, ignoring the fact that hysteria and abjection are significant breeders of subjective Identity.

The previous studies examined the selected works psychoanalytically but they lacked the conflation of Freud, Irigaray and Kristeva which this study employs in looking at hysteria as the female problem that induces women to actualise themselves. The conflating of Freud's, Irigaray's and Kristeva's concepts all together will help to understand the author's appropriation of hysteria and its remedy through abjection. These concepts will offer new critical insights about hysteria. They will reduce its negative consequences and elevate position of Kristeva's abjection as a concept employed in absolving the self and constructing identity. This study aims to examine hysteria inflicted by repression of desires and fantasies, social suppression, and



patriarchy. These elements led women to rebel against the current norms, and through abjection, they acted out what they could not verbally express in order to liberate themselves and construct their identities.

Morrison's novels are important in modern literature in which she portrays significant issues about women which can be found in different time and culture. Moreover, in her novels, Morrison meticulously portrays how hysteria influence females lives which can be interpreted by applying psychoanalysis theory. The critical insights into psychoanalysis are to provide literary works an intrinsic interpretation of the texts. That is, the main focus of analyzing the literary text depends on the psychoanalytic patterns of the literary works like the psychology of the fictional characters and the community's collective psychological dimension portrayed in the texts. Psychoanalysis, therefore, is concerned with the intrinsic elements of literary works and how they work together to provide the reader with the coherent peculiarities of narrative compositions. This critical approach is characterized by close reading of literary forms to reveal author's messages and implicit meaning found in the literary text.

The psychoanalytic reading of the selected works yields in scrutinizing the primary psychic aspects and their role to convey the author's (Morrison's) writing style. The specificity is the precise choice of words and their relationship with others. Lastly, psychoanalytic signification refers to hysteria, abjection and mimicry among psychoanalysis modes and patterns in the selected works. These concepts are interrelated and controlled by the process of the psychoanalytic projection axis.



Thus, this research will go initially with the notion of the major problems in society in order to diagnose the symptoms of such diseases as hysteria and its relation to female subjectivity. It will come up with the notion of female subjectivity and the notion of hysteria in order to propose a study the goal of which is to trace hysteria to identify reasons which breed hysteria in female characters and the influence of it on their lives. To find if hysteric females can have normal life or they can't. Moreover, by examining the possibility of abjection to act as active means which female use to reconstruct their identities, this can put end to the idea that hysteria is incurable and hysteric females have to go on their living as weak, passive and submissive characters.

### 1.6 Research Questions

In light of the above research objectives, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What are the underlying causes of hysteria in the characters in the selected novels by Toni Morrison?
2. How does Morrison portray hysteria in the characters of her selected novels?
3. How can the hysterical female characters be interpreted by applying the concepts of hysteria, mimicry and masquerade on the selected novels of Toni Morrison?
4. How does the concept of abjection motivate females to gain subjectivity and self-actualisation in the selected novels by Toni Morrison?

These research questions mirror the research objectives and will be addressed in the Methodology chapter to show how they will facilitate in attaining the research

objectives and thus solve the research problem and bridge the gap in the literature.

## 1.7 Research Objectives

The research aims to:

1-Explore the characteristics and representations of hysteria based on Freud's readings of hysteria and shed light on the importance hysteria adds to the selected novels.

2. Examine Morrison's depiction of hysteria in the characters of her selected novels based on Irigaray's readings of hysteria.

3. Explain the influence of hysteria on the characters in Morrison's selected novels and examine the workability of abjection as effective means in the process of self-actualization.

We cannot study hysteria and its reflection in novels without recognizing the characteristics of this disease, its reasons, and how it can be identified through women's bodies. Hysteria has many symptoms which clearly influence the personality it infects. Hysteria adds to the selected novels of this study. It indicates the fabric of society, its fragility and female's status in these societies which represent the embodiment of hysteria in the selected novels. Also females' suffering due to their gender can be seen clearly through the exploration of hysteria. All of this can be achieved in the first objective.

The second objective will be achieved through applying Irigaray's readings of

hysteria on the selected novels. Hysteria has many elements therefore we can study it through many perspectives. Since the time of Charcot at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, many critics studied hysteria under different titles and names. Applying Freud's and Irigaray's readings on the selected novels will explain how these two concepts are necessary for the understanding of hysteria and also will lead to the exploration and multiple readings of these texts. Hysteria can also be indicated through examining the themes of patriarchy, body exploitation, prostitution and other themes that involve women in its very centre.

The third objective focus on constructing identity, self-actualization, and acquiring subjectivity. Hysteria is a disease inflicted women but sometimes women use it to achieve their actualization. Hysteric characters are known as weak, submissive, simple and obedient persons at the beginning of their inflection, as in the case of Sorrow, Mavis, Florens, Pecola, and Sethe. This objective also aim to prove Kristeva's concept of abjection as a kind of filter which hysteric characters use to free themselves from hysteria. Using abjection will lead to self-actualization and construction of their aspired identity. In the third objective, I will examines the characters who suffer from hysteria and those who use abjection as defensive weapon. These characters are submissive and silence but they change at the end of the novels. These characters revolt against hysteria and abjection help them to construct themselves through liberating their selves and desires.

The following section introduces the Theoretical Framework based on the Theory of Psychoanalysis which guides the conceptual approach of this research.

## 1.8 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my research is intended to include psychoanalytic and feminist use of hysteria. It is limited to Freud's psychoanalysis theory and his perspectives of hysteria as a background study, Irigaray's views of hysteria and her two concepts of mimicry and masquerade along with Kristeva's concept of abjection.

Examining hysteria needs a psychoanalytic lens because it sheds light on what runs in the mind of the characters from motives, memories, perceptions that lead them to be a hysteric. Psychoanalysis also enables the interpretation of molestation, oppression, and harassment by family or society which can lead to the formation of hysteric. The main concern of psychoanalytic theory is the development of individual's personality, and it based on the unconscious structure which is changed and continuously influenced by the relation among childhood experiences, desire, and physiology. This theoretical method offers powerful and rich perspective to literary criticism. Freud studied hysteria from a psychopathological views and explained the reasons and justifications which lead women to be hysterics. Based on his Oedipal and pre-Oedipal theories, Freud links everything to the sexuality. In *Studies on Hysteria* Freud states that hysteria results from sexual trauma and that all patients he treated proved that their hysterical symptoms result from repression of sexual desires, incest or sexual molestation.

Freud's psychoanalysis theory states that repression of memories and sexual experiences are the main causes of hysteria. He confirms "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (Breuer and Freud, p. 7). Freud confirms that reminiscences results

from sexual motives and these memories are repressed in the unconscious, to be surface later as symptoms. Freud also claims that these symptoms appear as a result to incidents which motives and awakens them and lead to emerging as hysterical symptoms. Moreover, Freud emphasizes that sexual trauma is the base of all disturbance and it is the repressed memories of molestation, sexual assaults, and incest in childhood that lead to hysteria.

Hysteria could result from reasons other than those stated by Freud, as Luce Irigaray states. Her ideas on hysteria are extended and complement to Freud's ideas. Irigaray reads hysteria as a kind of protest against patriarchy and puts it outside the Symbolic order (which is the common structure that surrounding all human existence) (Kristeva, 1982). According to Irigaray, the hysteric "articulates a corporeal discourse; her symptoms speak on her behalf" (Grosz, p:135). So, according to Irigaray hysteria can be read as public product in addition to individual's repression to some reminiscences. Then, it is "the symptomatic acting out of a proposition the hysteric cannot articulate" (Gorsz. P: 134). In her book *This Sex Which is not One* (1985b), Irigaray claims that the hysteric female "unable to represent her desire in the Symbolic, consequently, will retreat into her body, and keep only a fragile link to the Symbolic Order" (1985b, p: 113). She also adds to Freud's thoughts on hysteria in including the role of the mother; and states that hysterical discourse connect with the maternal body. Irigaray states hysteria as "women's rejection of the injunction to nullify her own desires which empower her role in the Symbolic but to work from within to disrupt and expand its limits" (1985b, p:178). Thus, she claims that the phallogentric Symbolic order pushes women to be hysteric if they do not want to be submissive. She also states that women's expression of repressed desires is not allowed. Therefore, the

phallogocentric Symbolic order denied the female her own voice and desire. Women's inability to express their feeling in a male dominated society leads her to withdraw into her own body. This desire which does not have outlet will ultimately appear as "a script body language" (Irigaray 1985a, p:70).

From a feminist viewpoint, Irigaray reads hysteria as "a strategy women employ to contest patriarchal regulations" (1985a, p:145). Thus hysteria is read as a resistance to controlling social conditions. It is a unfulfilled form of feminism and a longing of women in a male dominated society.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) Kristeva explains her concept of abjection as "a process of rejecting certain parts of the body similar to the child's rejection of his mother to constitute his *I*. It helps in clarifying the subversion of hysteria as a means for attaining subjectivity" (Kristeva, 1982, p:2). According to Kristeva, abjection is "death infecting life. Abject is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and end up engulfing us" (p:4). It is then "an explanation for oppression and discrimination" (p:8). According to Kristeva, the abject result from the experiences of loss that appear after the separation from the *chora* between the infant and the mother. This separation leads to the formation of desire and language followed by a "rejection of borderline elements (such as hair, excrements, etc.) which threatens the autonomous identity of the subject" (p: 93).

The process of abjection is explained by "the child's separation from his mother *chora*' in order to create the borders that separate self from other to construct

identity” (p: 116). According to Freud, it is specified in the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal period, while in Lacan, it will be in the mirror stage. Thus, abjecting the mother is the first process that the infant do in order to create the independent body, and it is significant in the process of identity formation that is why it is necessary to this study. It works together with hysteria as it represents a protest and reaction alike to hysteria. Therefore, abjection can be read as a way for constructing identity and actualizing the self and it is vital for its important role to fulfill this study.

### 1.9 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is in the insights gained by exploring the reasons which make female characters’ suffer from hysteria and how it influence their lives and the strategies they use to get rid of it and finally identity formation in Morrison’s *Paradise*, *A Mercy*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Beloved*, which will enrich the scholarship on African-American literature. There have been several previous studies done in early and late 20<sup>th</sup> century by black women writers who dealt with the subject of hysteria. However, the majority of these studies on hysteria approached the subject matter using Lacanian or Freudian or even Irigarian concepts but each were studied separately. Furthermore, there is a dearth in research on Toni Morrison’s novels specifically concerning hysteria. This gap in the literature has been the motivation for this current study.

In fact, the uniqueness of this study is in its framework. Normally, researchers refer to one or two theories in their examination of hysteria, particularly those of Freud

or Lacan, and sometimes by others. This study presents three different readings by Freud and Irigaray on the one hand and through Kristeva's Abjection which is a way by which women resort to in their disgorgement of hysteria to find their identity. On the other hand, the incorporation of these three concepts in a single study puts an end to the idea that hysteric subjects are incurable and this is achieved by applying these concepts to de-hysterise the female subjects, in addition to assisting in the reformation of their identities. Moreover, this research will enlighten people on the significance of literature in dealing with human psychology and its relation to human behaviours. However, while this ground-breaking study is of significance in several ways, it is not all encompassing and there are limitations which are discussed in the following section.

### 1.10 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The concept of hysteria is traced in Morrison's *Paradise*, *A Mercy*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Beloved*. Hysteria, according to Freud's reading with its sub-concepts of fright hysteria and conversion hysteria, is applied to the mentioned texts to determine the hysteric symptoms according to Freud's interpretation. Additionally, Irigaray's reading of hysteria with two sub-concepts of mimicry and masquerade are meaningfully employed to highlight hysteria as a social phenomenon incorporated into women's bodies by society.

A third concept of Julia Kristeva's abjection is also applied to the mentioned texts in order to formulate the aspired identity as one of the study objectives. These



three readings, two of hysteria and one of abjection constitute to the conceptual framework employed for analysing the four selected novels.

Hysteria has been explored psychoanalytically, psychiatrically and socially. This current research is carried out according to psychoanalytic and cultural types only because of the effect of hysteria on society and its development, and how society aids in creating hysterics. The psychoanalytic way of study is most often associated with feminist critics who read and analyse female psyches and locate their studies under the title of psychoanalytic feminism. Thus, the psychiatric and medical readings of hysteria are excluded from this study.

Furthermore, hysteria and abjection are only applied to Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, *A Mercy* and *Paradise*, and the study is limited to these texts solely because hysteria is clearly evident in these texts. This study will look at Freud's and Irigaray's perspectives on hysteria, alongside Kristeva's abjection, and their application to the aforementioned novels. Whether the findings are applicable to Morrison's other novels or to the works of some other writers is not discussed in this study.

The section that follows on the definition of terms used in this study is of particular relevance in view of the fact that it is psychoanalytic study that involves the use of specific specialist terminologies and concepts.

### 1.11 Definitions of Terms



**1. Hysteria:** is defined as “a response, merging submission and resistance, to institutional and societal expectations and needs, conveyed in disassociation, alienation, fragmentation, and multiplicity which both precede and limit the position of a social subject” (Freud, 2013; and Irigaray, 1985b,p.68). This response is shown in symptoms like anorexia, bulimia, sleeplessness, aphasia, fright of abandonment, and hallucinations, among other such symptoms. These symptoms are portrayed in Morrison’s novels such as *Sula*, *Paradise*, *A Mercy*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Home* and *God Help the Child*.

**2. Abjection:** refers to what disturbs the identity, system, and order which should subsequently be rejected and discarded to gain an autonomous and subjective identity (Kristeva, 1982; Arya, 2014). It is a psychic process the subject uses to fight the destabilising impact of the abject to reaffirm identity and maintain subjectivity.

**3. Subjectivity:** is the opposite of objectivity, and refers to the self in recent criticism terminology. It highlights the realm of the individual’s consciousness, feeling and behaviour as determined by social forces. It also means a self-defined individual with free and executed desires which refers also to actualisation (Baldick, 2015 and Mijolla, 2005). In recent criticism subjectivity is used interchangeably with identity, which becomes the outcome of the self- actualisation process.

**4. Mimicry:** A temporary strategy for dealing with the realm of discourse “where the speaking subject is set as masculine” (Ganapathy-Doré, 2016), in which the female intentionally assumes the feminine style and position designated to her within this discourse so as to reveal the mechanisms by which it exploits her.

**5. Masquerade:** An alienated state or false version of femininity from “the woman's awareness of the man's desire for her to be his other” (Sümbül, 2015); the masquerade permits woman to experience desire not in her own right but as the man's desire situates her.

**6. Identity:** refers to “the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognizable or known” (Kristeva, 1982). Identity refers to what makes a person distinctive and can be identified by person’s self-conception in addition to his social presentation and behaviour. Identity can be achieved through subjectivity therefore it becomes the outcome of the process of subjectivity.

The next section provides a brief summary of the various sections with the Conclusion.

## 1.12 Conclusion

This introductory chapter began with a brief introduction to the study in 1.1, followed by a comprehensive Background of the study that discussed psychoanalysis as a theoretical approach and touched on hysteria as a psychological disorder that affects females in the context of works of fiction in Section 1.2. This is prior to the specific subject of Hysteria was introduced and explained in detail in Section 1.3. Following that, Toni Morrison, whose selected novels are the focus of this study was introduced and her stature as one of the most outstanding chroniclers of African-American literature described in Section 1.4.

The Statement of the Problem was then introduced and explained in detail in Section 1.5, followed by the Research Objectives in Section 1.6, and the formulated Research Questions in Section 1.7.

The sections that followed comprised the Theoretical Framework of the study in Section 1.8, the Significance of the Study including its contribution to the existing body of knowledge on hysteria and previous studies on Morrison's works in Section 1.9, followed by the Scope and Limitations of the study in Section 1.10, and then the Definitions of Terms used in this research in Section 1.11 that preceded this Conclusion section.

The next Chapter Two will present a comprehensive review of the literature and discuss previous studies related to this studies.