

Character Analysis Of Joe Trace In Jazz By Toni Morrison

Posted on October 22, 2019

Introduction

Jazz is a novel by [Toni Morrison](#) from who is a U.S based English writer. The novel was published in 1992 which falls under the category of historical epic novels; Morisson is a Nobel Prize winner author. The majority of events take place in Harlem during the 1920s, where the past of multiple characters of the novel exist and are explored by the novel. The story lays greater emphasis on the past of the characters. The novel utilizes the style of jazz music, which allows the characters to explore the events from the perspectives of their past. The character here chosen for analysis is Joe Trace, who is a cosmetics salesman in the novel. Joe goes from door to door and is also murdered by his young soulmate.

The Character Of Joe Trace

Joe Trace is the most important character in the novel, this character grows up in the Vesper County Virginia. The mother of Joe was a wild woman who broke the rules of society, and Joe made some attempts to find her but in vain. His memories go back to his past when he thinks of his mother; he moved to New York to make a decent living as a salesman, where he lived for two decades to shine his salesman career. He loved his past and his youth days, and he told his wife that he wanted to regain his youth excitement again, but their relationship ended in a violent way when both rejected each other. Docras, who was his wife, was killed by Joe while Docras saved her husband from the authorities to arrest him before she died. That was the time Joe was able to come to terms with his past, and Joe was able to forgive and respect his wife finally. He regretted his past and was able to have a loving memory of his wife.

He fell in love with his wife in the early 1900s, and they lived in New York together, but things became a little weird, and they both started acting like crazy people. In 1926, Joe was stalking Dorcas, and things began to become complicated between them. Dancing to jazz music is the moment of happiness in Joe's life, but they get along very badly, like a house on fire. The following quote from the novel reflects upon the personality of joe, "oe really acted like a scumbag, but we get a little bit of information about Violet's odd behavior prior to Dorcas's murder. She was trying to steal babies, talking nonsense, and carrying a baby doll. So yeah, the whole having-an-affair thing makes a little more sense now."

The Impact Of Culture And Past

When Joe brutally killed his kind-hearted wife, Dorcas, he felt a little bit guilty about what he had done wrong. The memories of her were almost haunting him because they never got along well; Violet became the wife of Joe who tore the face of Dorcas apart in disrespect. They got married in Virginia, and she was also struggling with the memories of her mother, who committed suicide by jumping into the well. The past and memories play a crucial role in the lives of characters because the memories of Dorcas were haunting Joe, and memories of Violet were making her lose her sanity. The following quote best describes their situation, "Violet struggles to preserve her sanity amidst the tumult of three miscarriages, her husband's affair, and her ebbing youth. After Dorcas' funeral, Violet relies upon Alice Manfred's advice to stay with her husband. " While Violet was not so young anymore and was not able to restore her physical body like she was young in the past. There is evidence in the novel that newcomers in the Jazz were shattered by significant geographical and social change in life.

The culture characters left behind have been a vital force that had left them all shattered; they could not bear their memories and could not live a better life. They were not able to handle their present roles in life and statuses because their past was shattered. That is the psychological factor that Morrison explains in his novel. When things are not clear in the past, the ability to do things in the future deteriorates as well, which is the theme of Morrison's novel.

What is left behind in life is an important part of values and morality. All of what was done in the past can apply in the future, which gives a sense of identity to a character. If you abandon your culture and past values, you struggle in the present and cannot find your way to a better life in the future. The home environment is a critical factor that is important for maintaining the well-being of people living there. People living with violent attitudes have little sense of morality and cultural values; they shatter ethical values and do not refrain from breaking the rules of society. Some aspects of the home environment are difficult to measure, and the challenges of life become more complex when you have to deal with a regretful past. Therefore, the culture, community and environment can be considered as human factors relevant to successful life in the present. Technology was not so impactful in the 1920s, and people used the social support system at home to help each other.

The author convinces the audience that culture influences our lives in a number of ways. The human evolution process consists of language evolution, and humans have the skill to learn and grow from time to time. They learn from each other; the elements of culture, ideas, beliefs, and songs, including jazz music and art, can be transmitted to others from the past. The culture that one leaves behind can be transferred to another person by recalling the memories. A person is like a fish, and culture is like water in which he or she lives and survives. Until you interact with each other on a daily basis, you are not able to understand the cultural values or learn from other cultures. The worldviews of all the characters, like Joe, Violet and Dorcas, are influenced by the past culture they left behind. The way their family members behaved in a particularly American culture in the 1920s, and the way they interacted with people back then was like a set of protocols for them to follow.

The American culture has become diverse and dynamic over the years, it has been changing since the 1900s which helps to determine the character of people. The specific group of characters has no choice but to adopt the culture they live in, and they have to demonstrate successful ways of life to survive within the culture. But culture does not remain the same all the time; it changes constantly. Joe wanted to retain the old way of his youth while he failed to develop healthy relationships with his lover. The characters could not envision a world of hope in their future and committed suicide or killed someone. Joe's mother had abandoned him and he was not able to find her again, he ended up shooting Dorcas in 1926 while she was dancing to the beat of jazz music. The culture is evident here in the dance party where illicit drinking was going on.

How the lives of characters goes down depends on their memories, their attitudes in the past cultures; Joe never had a happy marriage, he had to shoot the young girl with a gun just to keep the memories of love alive. He was struggling to create a loving future that resembled his past; Violet also did what any crazy woman struggling with her past would do: she cut the face of the dead girl Dorcas. Joe was lucky when Dorcas did not tell the authorities about his shooting her, his aunt was also not able to file charges against Violet because the fee of attorney was too high. The household of Joe and Violet was also significantly bleak. New York City was beautiful, as the narrator described it. Being too old, Violet could not have a baby which was the reason for her saying inappropriate things.

References

"Jazz Study Guide | Gradesaver." Web. 2018.