CHAPTER-1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Dove's poems are culturally rich, talk about black heritage, imagery in language and use lots of symbol, metaphors which makes conscious to Black culture. Rita Dove has brought African-American expression into the mainstream of American poetry. Her imagination is culturally critical, at times satiric and mythic universalizing. In reading Dove's poetry, we can get lots of cultural consciousness no matter she addresses directly or indirectly, we can get lots of symbol, imagery, metaphors etc. about black culture. Dove has focused on family life and personal struggle, addressing the larger social, political and cultural dimensions of black experience primarily by indirection. From the very beginning of her poem collections, she takes the reference from other poets and it designates the idea of culture and consciousness. In a poem “In primer for the Nuclear Age,” she writes, "Doc all my life people say/I was ugly. (pause) Makes me feel mean"(3-5). And it is a quotation by Boris Karloff, in “The Raven.” Her “The Bird Frau” truly catches her idea of cultural consciousness. “The Bird Frau” expresses the disoriented anxiety and anticipations of a half starved German women in wartime and illustrate Dove's historical imagination, her readiness to inhabit another consciousness. In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Dove’s literary style is taken as:

> Dove’s rich sense of language and her love of sound are joined to a disciplined formal sense. The form of poem often holds in place different or ambitions feeling, and keeps the expression of feeling understated while restraint is one of the strength of Dove’s poetry. (Franklin and Gottesnon 2810)

Dove frequently uses color symbol, perhaps it makes her conscious about her culture and root. She uses many black related cultural colors. Such as: black, gray, yellow, ash, dark gray, purple, brown, deep brown, pale, radish brown, olive, pink etc. and white as oppose. In

“Upon Meeting Don L.Lee, In a Dream,” she writes: Among the trees, the black trees,/ Women in robes stand, watching (5-6). In “This life,” she writes: He came in white breeches and sandals. / He had a goatee- he had (11-12). She uses some metaphors which also indicate the black culture, such as, sparrow, black trees, dark tie, nigger night, black table, stars, broken eyes of windows, blue bullet etc.

Dove presents slavery as a human predicament as well as cultural evil. In “Belinda's Petition,” she writes:

> To the honorable senate and House
> of Representatives of this country,
> new born: I am Belinda, an African,
> since the age of twelve a slave. (1-4)

Rita Dove also talks about the existential problems of African people throughout her poetry. As she writes in “Belinda's Petition.”: As to the accusation that I am ignorant / I received Existence on the Banks / of the Rio de Valta (11-13). She uses symbols of the struggle for individual freedom as well as for an inclusive culture. Some of the most notable poems, such as “Ozone,” critique the damaged culture in which parents raised children. She has earned praise for plain spoken poems reflecting her life and the experiences of African-Americans. Her poems still search freedom from white world making black culturally conscious. She has the added quality of being able to create extended works entering into and dramatizing the consciousness of those very different from herself.

She has got many cultural, racial, historical and humanistic types of response. Past commentary on Rita Dove's poetry has frequently, and correctly, focused upon its graceful phrasing of language. As is often the case for others among our best poets, reviewers have pointed out the lyricism and musicality evident in her carefully crafted lines, even in her more narrative poems. In *American Tradition in Literature,* Geroge parkins and Barbara Parkins write:

> Dove's is a verse of plain statement, often in the present tense, a direct and immediate representation or World. The setting of her enigmatic lyrics moves from Ohio to Germany to Israel, and the time frames shift from the present to the past both historical and personal. In a single volume slaves, biblical characters, mythological figures, and members of Dove's own family stand side by side. (1780)

Dove's poetry is grounded in reality yet capable of sky high buoyancy. Thus Rita Dove is a poet who writes with cultural consciousness and her poems are able to bring cultural awareness.

1.2. Rita Dove as a Black Poet

Rita Dove was born in Akron, Ohio in 1952, as the second of Ray and Elvira Dove's four children. She was born in such a family where the parents emphasized on education. Steven Ratiner of the *Christian Science Monitor* referred to Rita's parents' influence as intellectual discipline.

Rita began playing cello at the age of ten, and her experience with music led to her experimentation with poetry. She told to Steven Ratiner in one interview:

> I think music was one of those first experiences I had of epiphany, of something clicking, of understanding something beyond, deeper than rational sense. I began writing poems and keeping them hidden in a notebook. ("Ratiner")

When she was in 11th grade, her English teacher, Miss Peg Oechsner, took her to a poetry reading by John Ciardi at a writers' conference downtown. This was Dove's first realization that a person could actually make a living writing poetry.

In 1970, Rita was one of the country's top 100 high school graduates, and she visited the White House as a Presidential Scholar. She earned a national merit scholarship and attended college at Miami University in Ohio. Since she had grown up a good student, with

the expectation that she would become a doctor or a lawyer, she entered college as a pre-law major and kept her poetry secret. No one in her family ever said anything against poetry, but writing was never a suggested vocation.

But eventually, Dove says in Ranter interview:

> More than anything else, I wanted to write," she said. So she changed her major to English, thinking "I'll become a teacher of writing so I can support my habit" ("Ratiner").

Rita graduated from Miami University, Phi Beta Kappa, in 1973. After that, she received a Fulbright fellowship to attend the University of Tubingen in West Germany. When she returned to the U.S., Rita began her master of fine arts at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. In 1975, she was the only Black student in the prestigious program. Now, three decades later, with a host of awards and a dazzling career, Dove is still distressed by the fact that multicultural representation is not the norm in American literature.

Dove received her M.F.A. from Iowa in 1977. In 1979, she married Fred Viebahn, a German novelist whom she met in school in Iowa. Rita published her first poetry collection, *The Yellow House on the Corner,* in 1980. She began teaching at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, in 1981; she gave birth to her daughter, Aviva, in 1983. In 1987, Dove's third book of poetry, *Thomas and Beulah,* won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. These poems, loosely based on the lives of Dove's maternal grandparents, are arranged in two sections: one devoted to Thomas and the other to Beulah.

In 1993, Rita Dove was named Poet Laureate, the first African-American and, at 40 years of age, the youngest person ever to hold that post. Many poet laureates see a frustrating lack of 'real' responsibility for the position.

But Dove saw the position as a great opportunity. Dove was one of few Poet Laureates to continue for two years. Dove said about the experience of being Poet Laureate in *An Interview with Rita Dove* which Helen Vendler writes:

> Much more gratifying than I anticipated. I was apprehensive... I feared every time I talked about poetry, it would be filtered through the lens of race, sex, and age. What I discovered was that there were people all over the country who were hungry for poetry and were eager to embrace the multitude of voices that can be heard through poetry. (491)

But Dove's public visibility began to encroach on her private life, especially when it came to finding silent, contemplative time to write. To help with this problem, Dove had a writing cabin built in the backyard of her home. In interview to Ratiner, she says:

> I am concerned with race, but certainly not every poem of mine mentions the fact of being Black. They are poems about humanity and sometimes humanity happens to be Black. I cannot run from, I won't run from any kind of truth ("Ratiner").

Rita's 1999 book, *On the Bus with Rosa Parks,* earned her acclaim for its powerful last cycle of poems based on an experience she had with her daughter, when the two found themselves on the same bus as the famous Civil Rights icon.

In addition to poetry, Rita Dove also wrote fiction, in the form of short stories (*Fifth Sunday,* a collection about the 'fable-like aspects of middle-class life') and a novel, *Through the Ivory Gate,* set in Akron in the 1970s. She also wrote a play, *The Darker Faces of the Earth.* It's in blank verse, the form used by Shakespeare, and it sets the Oedipus story in the days of slavery in America.

When she is not writing, Dove continues to play music, both jazz and classical, and she sings in operas near her home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Her 2004 book of poetry, *American Smooth,* is named for a form of ballroom dancing in which the partners are free to release each other from the closed embrace and dance without any physical contact, thus permitting improvisation and individual expression, she writes on the book's opening page. Dove and her husband took up ballroom dancing shortly after a fire destroyed part of their

home and many of their manuscripts in 1998. Then a means for healing, the pastime has become one of the couple's greatest passions.

She believes she has a Midwestern sensibility that 'has its feet on the ground but at the same time is looking around with that kind of pioneer spirit. She says, when I envision a backyard, it's going to be a Midwestern back yard; it's going to be an Akron back yard. Akron, and all of Ohio for that matter, truly loves and appreciates Rita Dove, the poet from its own backyard.

1.3 Culture and Rita Dove's Poetry

Rita Dove in terms of culture - culture in language, culture in history, culture in race raises questions about the English language. Rita Dove's poetry as lovely, is also saying 'black is now beautiful.' Does this comment address the cultural tradition of the laureate post's white majority? Why is Dove described as 'quite different'? Is it because she is first to occupy the laureate position as an African-American? Is culture really a determinant of her uniqueness as a poet? Why does the writer choose to mention that 'breaking cultural barriers is a tradition in her own family?' Does this give Dove creditability? Why is it important to describe her novelist husband as German? Are the readers supposed to conjure ideas of his cultural identity due to a different language or culture? That shorts of question raises the issue of the Black Culture.

Rita Dove herself even speaks of culture in order to set herself apart. While recognizing her experience as a female may be more important to her writing, she also recognizes that her 'blackness' influences her writing. Dove, consciously or unconsciously, recognizes (or is a victim of) America's obsession with culture. She wants to reduce the anxiety that people have about poetry.

Rita Dove, a contemporary African-American poet, attempts to reconcile these contradictions between the English language and its African-American speakers by ignoring both notions of race and 'race.' But like a shadow lingering behind her words, 'race' creeps

up and demands attention. I believe Dove's attempts to overlook 'race' or her critic's applause of her ability to do so, is dangerous because it displays an attitude of indifference to the English language as a carrier of racism. In the long run, Dove is unable to disregard this racism. Warren Frenc, John Ietel and other writers of *American Literature* write:

> Her ability to handle characterization, story telling, and a realistic though suggestive, imagery were acclaimed by the Chicago Tribune "What makes Rita Dove's work appealing in her ability to draw real characters holding jobs, raising families, drinking beer, playing music, and culture are hot source. (184)

Both critics of Dove and Dove herself comment on her poetry as transcending 'race,' as speaking to humanity on a universal level, using history as its guise. Arnold Rampersad marks Dove's poetry as unique, as more dignified than the writers who came just before her (in the 1960s and 1970s) because "instead of an obsession with the theme of race, one finds an eagerness, perhaps even an anxiety, to transcend - if not actually to repudiate - black cultural nationalism in the name of a more inclusive sensibility" (133). If Rampersad believes Dove's poetry can evoke a spirit of inclusion, he is unaware of the exclusivity of the English language. And an obsession with 'race' (not racism) is a result of the language's obsession with it initially, not a writer's. Dove writes of the Black experience, but blurs notions of 'race' as insignificant in her poetry. In a 1993 interview with *The Christian Science Monitor*, she argues:

> As human beings, we are endowed with this incredible gift to articulate our feelings and to communicate them to each other in very sophisticated ways . . . In writing a poem, if the reader on the other end can come up and say: "I know what you meant, I mean, I felt that too" - then we are a little less alone in the world, and that to me is worth an awful lot. (Rampersad 52)

Here, Dove's attempts to presently view ‘race’ as an invisible construct in the sense that she speaks of readers as human beings. Instead of finding differences among her readers, Dove finds ‘worth’ in mutual meaning, mutual feelings. To ignore the sophistication of racism in the English language, however, could make the mutual communication and articulation of feelings that Dove speaks of here impossible or at the least, very difficult. Keith Gilyard and Anissa Wardi write in *African American Literature*:

> Thomas and Beulah making her the second African American to win the award. In 1993 she was appeared to a two year term as eh poet Laureate of the United State, the youngest person on first African American to be so honored… “The Zulus” is taken. She also has been commonwealth professor of English at the University of Virginia. (452)

Ironically, the ‘anonymous’ English language, however, forces Dove to re-tell the history of Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806, the first Black man to create an almanac and predict a solar eclipse; appointed to the commission that designed Washington D.C.) with ‘race’-conscious voices, not voices all human beings could feel ‘less alone’ with. "Banneker" (1983) contains three voice categories - white voices (those of the Baltimore citizens), Banneker's voice as a Black man, and Dove's voice, as an omniscient historian and advocate of her race.

Many Black poets prior to Dove's career were accused of violently using ‘race’ in their writing - writing that became radical, sloppy, and inspired by recklessness (Rampersad 133). While I do not believe Dove is completely unaware of the role of ‘race’ in the English language, her use of the English language will not allow her to speak to humanity as a whole without offending many of its speakers. John Wideman writes in his book *The Black Writer and the Magic of the Word* about race:

> It is impossible. Dove can only use and manipulate the racist English language. Except for the deconstruction of "race,” the suggestion to de-

radicalize terms like "black" and "white," and the creation "of an Afro-American version of English" (28).

African American writers do not belong to English and yet they belong nowhere else. I am skeptical of any solution that does not overhaul the whole English language and yet this seems quite a daunting task considering the Bible and Shakespeare are fixed entities. Wideman believes "it's not a question of making a little more room in the inn but tearing the building down, letting the tenants know their losses are such that not one is assured of a place, that the notion of permanently owning a place is as defunct as the inn" (23). The English language has left no room at the inn for African Americans. So, where can they find a language that shelters their experience and identity? The possibilities are as seemingly invisible as the racism of 'race.'

1.4 Contemporary Poets of Rita Dove

All African American literature to some extent challenges racism. At the very least, it stands as testament to Black humanity in a society where the possibilities of Black selfhood have been often contested, suppressed or denied. Thus there is an element of protest in every story, play, poem or essay penned by an African American. African Americans have celebrated Black protest writing. Some have felt that it focuses too much on stereotypes environmental determinism, and the mindsets of white people. It has been furthermore argued that the result of such writing is a reduction in the variety of complexity and complexity of the African American experiences presented to the public. Notwithstanding these criticisms, writers working in the protest vein have produced some of the most important and powerful works in the African American literary tradition.

Baraka, Amiri (1934-), American playwright, poet, and political activist, whose poems, novels, plays, and essays were a major force throughout the late 1960s in pushing African American literature away from themes of integration toward a focus on the black experience, is one of the contemporary writer of Rita Dove. His first major play *Dutchman,*

opened in New York in 1964 and won an Obie Award (an off-Broadway award given by the Village Voice newspaper) and Baraka's second major play, *The Slave* (1964), both dealt with the corrosive effects of racism. In 1964 he also founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater.

Born December 14, 1945, in Chicago, *Carolyn Rodgers* became, in the 1960s, an important member of the Chicago based Organization of Black American Culture. She emerged as a leading voice among African American poets both logically and analytically. Her work has been visionary yet grounded in everyday African American experience. Her poetry, *Songs of black Bird* appeared in 1969.

As an African American woman, *Nikki Giovanni* has written many revolutionary poems reflecting on the culture and heritage of her race. Spending much of her youth growing up in Knoxville, Tennessee, Giovanni's childhood has greatly influenced her writing. Nikki Giovanni, (Yolande Cornelia Giovanni is her given name) was born June 7, 1943 in Knoxville Tennessee. As a child, she attended an Episcopal school, and when it came time for her to start college, she enrolled at Fisk University. Shortly after she graduated, Giovanni set up her own publishing company and published her very first collection of poems, *Black Feeling, Black Talk*. Since then Giovanni has written many powerful poems and collections, as well as a few albums of her poems recorded to gospel music.

One of her most well-known poems, titled "Nikki-Rosa," was inspired by her childhood. This poem examines the relationship between love and wealth, reflecting on how much love Giovanni was surrounded by as a child, despite her poverty. Another significant poem in Giovanni's career is "Black Feeling, Black Talk." In this poem Giovanni takes on a revolutionary perspective, promoting violence and illustrating the identity of her race. Along with inspiration from black family culture, and racial issues, many of Nikki Giovanni's poems showcase her strong faith in God, as well as womanhood. Blues music and rhythm are also key components of many of Giovanni's pieces.

Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, as the eighth and last child of Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker, who were sharecroppers. When Alice Walker was eight years old, she lost sight of one eye when one of her older brothers shot her with a BB gun by accident. In high school, Alice Walker was valedictorian of her class, and that achievement, coupled with a "rehabilitation scholarship" made it possible for her to go to Spelman, a college for Black women in Atlanta, Georgia.

1.5. Review of Literature

Rita Dove, poet laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995, attracted many poets, critics, and readers. As a first African American poet since Gwendolyn Brooks to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, she has got many cultural, racial, historical, and humanistic types of response. The devices such as, rhyme, perfect structure, sharp language, which she uses in her poetry, touches the heart of the readers. Besides, her cultural and racial perspectives play the vital role in her poetry. San Francisco publication acclaim for the poetry of Rita Dove, which she mentioned in her *Selected Poetry*, "Rita Dove's poetry is infused with the wit and wisdom of generations of Black women who have come before her. She is a leading literary voice with some of the most impressive technical skills among poets today" (Cover). Like San Francisco in *The Nation Anthology*, writes about the uses of cultural images in her poetry, writes:" Rita Dove (uses) image to shoot forward and backward in history-both personal and national-and ultimately to open an unexpected imaginative realm. This, ladies and gentleman, is a ...writer worth knowing" (1132). In *Twentieth Century American Poetry*, poet Keki N. Daruwalla writes about Rita Dove's *American Smooth*:

> The book gives very few quotes, which poetry criticism needs, specially in the case of Afro-American poets who hardly figure in American anthologies and who, stylistically, have branched out at a tangent. Yet, to be fair, one quote from Amiri Baraka (born LeRoy Jones) lights up Black consciousness. Baraka, before he became a Muslim (in 1967) did not write political poems.

> Then he put white culture behind him. Here's what he says in his poem "Leroy": "When I die, the consciousness I carry I will to/ Black people. May they pick me apart and take the/ useful parts, the sweet meat of my feelings. And leave/ the bitter bullshit rotten white parts/ alone" (654).

Dove has focused on family life and personal struggle, addressing the larger social, political and cultural dimensions of Black experience primarily by indirection. As *Newsweek* acclaimed and Rita Dove cites in her back cover of the *Selected Poems*:

> Rita Dove . . . is a devoted and subtle storyteller (whose) gifts are evoking, and sometimes exalting, the everyday moments we live by but may neglect or forget, the music of her words issuing a message of uncanny integrity and calm. Though often writing of private experience (mothering, mourning death, watching rain), she never seems to lose sight of the world beyond. (Cover)

The time frame, in her poetry shift from the present to the past, both historical and personal. *The Washington Post* comments on her setting which Dove cites in the back cover of the *Selected Poems*: "Dove's work ranges from pastoral to the intimate, touching humorously on modern times"(Cover. About Dove's capacity of presenting real characters *Chicago Tribune* writes: "what makes Dove's work appealing is her ability to draw real characters holding jobs, raising families, drinking beer, playing music, and eating catfish dripping with hot sauce" (23).

Critic B.J Bolden says about her poem, "This Life" in his work *Poetry and Hidden Art in Black Literature*:

> 'This Life' is about evolution, a contract of the then and the now. The speaker has made a journey from the bright innocence of youth to the sober reality of maturity" Dove enhances her theme of life as an emotional, cultural and psychological journey with the subtle injection of images of memory" (56).

Rita Dove is a wonderful poet whose work, in its complexity, deserves our close attention. Her book addresses important cultural, philosophical, aesthetic, and technical issues raised within this vital body of art.

CHAPTER-2

Black Culture, Consciousness, and Literature

2.1. An Introduction to Culture

Culture is the most important concept in anthropology—the study of all aspects of human life. Culture, in anthropology, refers to the patterns of behaviour and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share. Culture distinguishes one human group from others. It also distinguishes humans from other animals. A people's culture includes their beliefs, rules of behavior, language, rituals, art, and technology, styles of dress, ways of producing and cooking food, religion, and political and economic systems. S.P. Chaube and A. Chaube write about culture in *Foundation of Education* as:

> The term culture we shall imply all those things which man has made for physical, mental, and spiritual advancements. Evidently, in this context we shall exclude the things pertaining to nature in its original form. Thus within the 'culture' come all those things which man has made or has thought of in terms of ideas and knowledge. (311)

Anthropologists commonly use the term culture to refer to a society or group in which many or all people live and think in the same ways. Likewise, any group of people who share a common culture—and in particular, common rules of behavior and a basic form of social organization—constitutes a society. Thus, the terms culture and society are somewhat interchangeable. However, while many animals live in societies, such as herds of elk or packs of wild dogs, only humans have culture.

Culture developed together with the evolution of the human species, Homo sapiens, and is closely related to human biology. The ability of people to have culture comes in large part from their physical features: having big, complex brains; an upright posture; free hands that can grasp and manipulate small objects; and a vocal tract that can produce and articulate a wide range of sounds. These distinctively human physical features began to develop in

African ancestors of humans more than four million years ago. The earliest physical evidence of culture is crude stone tools produced in East Africa over two million years ago.

Culture expresses symbol. Symbols allow people to develop complex thoughts and exchange those thoughts with others. People have culture primarily because they can communicate with and understand symbols. Symbols allow people to develop complex thoughts and to exchange those thoughts with others. Language and other forms of symbolic communication, such as art, enable people to create, explain, and record new ideas and information.

To convey new ideas, people constantly invent new symbols, such as for mathematical formulas. In addition, people may use one symbol, such as a single word, to represent many different ideas, feelings, or values. Thus, symbols provide a flexible way for people to communicate even very complex thoughts with each other. For example, only through symbols can architects, engineers, and construction workers communicate the information necessary to construct a skyscraper or bridge.

In addition, the human vocal tract, unlike that of chimpanzees and other animals, can create and articulate a wide enough variety of sounds to create millions of distinct words. In fact, each human language uses only a fraction of the sounds humans can make. The human brain also contains areas dedicated to the production and interpretation of speech, which other animals' lack. Thus, humans are predisposed in many ways to use symbolic communication.

Men are not born with culture; they have to learn it. For instance, men must learn to speak and understand a language and to abide by the rules of a society. In many societies, all man must learn to produce and prepare food and to construct shelters. In other societies, men must learn a skill to earn money, which they then use to provide for themselves. In all human societies, children learn culture from adults. Anthropologists call this process enculturation, or cultural transmission.

Culture is shared. Men in the same society share common behavior and ways of thinking through culture. Culture is adaptive. Men use culture to flexibly and quickly adjust to changes in the world around them. Ralth Linton writes in *The study of Man* as:

> While men biologically inherit many physical traits and behavioral instincts, culture is socially inherited. Thus the culture is the sum of the total integrated pattern of knowledge, attitudes, and natural behavioral pattern shared and transmitted by the member of the particular society. (272)

Culture is adaptive. Culture helps human societies survive in changing natural environments. For example, the end of the last Ice Age, beginning about 15,000 years ago, posed an enormous challenge to which humans had to adapt. Before this time, large portions of the northern hemisphere were covered in great sheets of ice that contained much of the earth's water. In North America, large game animals that roamed the vast tundra provided people with food and materials for clothing and simple shelters. When the earth warmed, large Ice Age game animals disappeared, and many land areas were submerged by rising sea levels from melting ice. But people survived. They developed new technologies and learned how to subsist on new plant and animal species. Eventually some people settled into villages of permanent, durable houses and farms. Culture must benefit people, at least in the short term, in order for it to be passed on to new generations.

2.3. "Black consciousness" in Dove's Poetry

"Black Consciousness" approach would be irrelevant in a colorless and non-exploitative egalitarian society. It is relevant here because it is believe that an anomalous situation is a deliberate creation of man.

"Black Consciousness" is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realization by the Black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind

them to perpetual servitude. It is based on a self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by seeking to run away from themselves and emulate the white man, they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them Black. The philosophy of Black Consciousness therefore expresses group pride and the determination of the Black to rise and attain the envisaged self. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by Blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude, but if one's mind is so manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his powerful masters. Hence thinking along lines of Black Consciousness makes the Black man see himself as a being complete in himself. It makes him less dependent and more free to express his manhood. At the end of it all he cannot tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of his manhood. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Brandbury writes in *From Puritalins to Postmodernism, A history of American Literature*:

> ‘Middle passage’ descries the agonies of he Black journey to slaveholding America with Melvillean depth and power. Hayden has shown younger writers such as Michael Harper and Rita Dove an alternative to the traditional Black course of imitating English verse from or sacrificing craft to the passions of protest. (402)

In all aspects of the black-white relationship, now and in the past, we see a constant tendency by whites to depict blacks as of an inferior status. The first people to come and relate to blacks in a human way in South Africa were the missionaries. They were in the vanguard of the colonization movement to "civilize and educate" the savages and introduce the Christian message to them. The religion they brought was quite foreign to the black indigenous people. African religion in its essence was not radically different from Christianity. They also believed in one God, and in the inherent goodness of man—hence

they took it for granted that all people at death joined the community of saints and therefore merited respect.

It was the missionaries who confused the people with their new religion. They scared native people with stories of hell. They painted their God as a demanding God who wanted worship or else. People had to discard their clothes and their customs in order to be accepted in this new religion. Knowing how religious the African people were, the missionaries stepped up their terror campaign on the emotions of the people with their detailed accounts of eternal burning, tearing of hair and gnashing of teeth. By some strange and twisted logic, they argued that theirs was a scientific religion and others a superstition.

A long look should also be taken at the educational system for Blacks. The same tense situation was found as long ago as the arrival of the missionaries. Children were taught, under the pretext of hygiene, good manners and other such vague concepts, to despise their mode of upbringing at home and to question the values and customs of their society. The result was the expected one—children and parents saw life differently and the former lost respect for the latter. Now in African society it is a cardinal sin for a child to lose respect for his parent. Yet how can one prevent the loss of respect between child and parent when the child is taught by his know-all white tutors to disregard his family teachings? Who can resist losing respect for his tradition when in school his whole cultural background is summed up in one word—barbarism?

Thus we can immediately see the logic of placing the missionaries in the forefront of the colonization process. A man who succeeds in making a group of people accept a foreign concept in which he is expert makes them perpetual students whose progress in the particular field can only be evaluated by him; the student must constantly turn to him for guidance and promotion. Only he can tell us how good our performance is and instinctively each of us is at pains to please this powerful, all-knowing master. This is what Black Consciousness seeks to eradicate.

The culture must be defined in concrete terms. We must relate the past to the present and demonstrate a historical evolution of the modern Black man. A culture is essentially the society's composite answer to the varied problems of life. We are experiencing new problems every day and whatever we do add to the richness of our cultural heritage as long as it has man as its centre. The adoption of Black theatre and drama is one such important innovation which is needed to be encouraged and developed.

Capitalistic exploitative tendencies, coupled with the overt arrogance of white racism, have conspired against the Black. As W. Lawrance writes:

> Being part of an exploitative society in which we are often the direct objects of exploitation, we need to evolve a strategy towards our economic situation. We are aware that the blacks are still colonised even within the borders of South Africa. Their cheap labour has helped to make South Africa what it is today. Our money from the townships takes a one-way journey to white shops and white banks, and all we do in our lives is pay the white man either with labour or in coin. (32)

One of the basic tenets of Black Consciousness is totality of involvement. This means that all blacks must sit as one big unit, and no fragmentation and distraction from the mainstream of events be allowed. Lawrance further writes:

> We are oppressed not as individuals, not as Zulus, Xhosas, Vendas or Indians. We are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group. We must cling to each other with a tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil. As we proceed further towards the achievement of our goals let us talk more about ourselves and our struggle and less about whites. (53-54)

The basic problem in South Africa has been analyzed by liberal whites as being apartheid. They argue that in order to oppose it we have to form non-racial groups. Between

these two extremes, they claim, lies the land of milk and honey for which we are working. The thesis, the anti-thesis and the synthesis have been mentioned by some great philosophers as the cardinal points around which any social revolution revolves. For the liberals, the thesis is apartheid, the antithesis is non-racialism, but the synthesis is very feebly defined. They want to tell the blacks that they see integration as the ideal solution. Black Consciousness defines the situation differently. The thesis is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, the antithesis to this must, ipso facto, be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to prey.

The concepts which the Black Consciousness approach wishes to eradicate from the black man's mind before our society is driven to chaos by irresponsible people from Coca-Cola and hamburger cultural backgrounds. Abrams, M.H. writes in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* about culture:

> Cultural Studies is the analysis and interpretation of objects and social practices outside the realm of literature and other arts; these phenomena are viewed as endowed with meanings that are the product of social forces and conventions, and they may either express or oppose the dominant structures of power in culture. (54)

Generally, cultural consciousness attention to literary work, rather it is hidden matter which can get through conscious effort.

2.4. Black Literature

Poems, short stories, autobiographies, novels and plays written by African Americans provide a unique window into the black experience. Most slaves were denied the opportunity to learn to read. The achievement of literacy, and especially the publication of poetry and autobiographies, demonstrated to many people that blacks had the ability to create works of literary merit and achieve the same accomplishments as whites. Lucy Terry, an African-born Rhode Island slave who obtained her freedom in 1756, composed the first known poem by an

African American. Terry's poem, known as "Bars Fight," which recounts a battle between Native Americans and whites that took place in 1746, was preserved in oral form until its publication in 1855. In 1773 African American poet Phillis Wheatley published Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, the first African American work of literature to be widely distributed.

While the autobiography was the most popular form of African American literature during the 19th century, African Americans also described their lives in poetry and fiction. Poet George Moses Horton, a Virginia slave, wrote of his desire for freedom in *The Hope of Liberty* (1829). William Wells Brown's Clotel; or, *The President's Daughter* (1853) was the first novel written by an African American author. Published in Britain in 1854, Clotel is a fictional account of slave children allegedly fathered by U.S. president Thomas Jefferson. The first novel published in the United States by an African American author and the first novel written by a black woman, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) detailed the difficulties faced by Northern free blacks. Free black writer Frances Ellen Watkins Harper published several volumes of poetry and four novels, as well as many stories, essays, and letters that balanced her desire for artistic expression with her commitment to abolition and women's rights.

Independent black theater flourished in northern cities for a brief period in the 1820s. The first play by a black writer was Henry Brown's *The Drama of King Shotaway* (1823), based on a slave insurrection on the island of Saint Vincent in the West Indies. The script of the play has since been lost. By the 1830s white officials had shut down black theaters, claiming they caused disorderly conduct.

After the Civil War, black writers continued to publish autobiographies, fiction, and poetry that reflected and interpreted the experiences of African Americans. Charles Chesnutt became the first black writer of fiction to receive widespread support from the mainstream white publishing industry. Between 1899 and 1905, Chesnutt published two collections of

short stories and three novels, and became the most influential black writer in the United States. *Up From Slavery* (1901), by educator Booker T. Washington, continued the tradition of black autobiography. Poet Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote many of his poems in African American dialect.

Since the 1960s, black writers have continued to explore the black experience, increasingly gaining national and international recognition. Works such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) by Maya Angelou and Brothers and Keepers (1984) by John Edgar Wideman have continued the tradition of black autobiography. August Wilson has explored the central conflicts facing blacks in each decade of the 20th century in an ongoing cycle of ten plays, which have won great acclaim and earned two Pulitzer Prizes. From 1993 to 1995, Rita Dove served as poet laureate of the United States, the first black woman to fill that position. Novelist Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993.

2.5. Black Culture in Relation to Dove's Poetry

Cultural and racial perspective plays the vital role in the poetry of Rita Dove. She is success in articulating black feeling, hope and dream in her poetry. She has used lots of imagery, symbols, metaphors in her poetry which makes conscious to black culture. Dove frequently uses color symbols; perhaps it makes her conscious about her culture and root. Use of color symbols can be found time and again in her poetry. Let's take some lines from her poetry. In "Small Town" she says, "Someone is sitting in the red house / The woman wears a pale blue nightgown" (lines 12, 13). In "Upon Meeting" she says, "Among the trees, the black trees" (line 5). In "Nigger Song": An Odyssey she says, "Into the gray- green nigger night / The green smoke sizzling on our tongues" (lines 10-11). The frequent use of colors in the above lines shows that she and her poems both are conscious about "black" color and culture.

She starts her poem "Sightseeing" Come here, I want to show you something" She wants to show something to others, to make conscious, and to awake others throughout her poems. Dove's poem "The Transport of Slaves from Maryland to Mississippi" dramatizes an

1839 incident in which a slave woman prevented a wagonload of slaves from escaping by helping the wounded negro driver give the alarm to the white owners. Dove's another poem “Lady Freedom Among Us,” written during Dove's period as Poet Laureate (1993-95), commemorates the return of the statue of Freedom to the Capital Dome. The touch of black phrasing and the pun on U.S. in the title indicates Dove's confidence in ethnic diversity as the norm "among us." Published in a limited fine art edition and also on the internet, “Lady Freedom Among Us” speaks directly to the American people, imperatively, individually: don't lower your eyes/ or stare straight ahead to where/ you thing you ought to be going." “On the Bus with Rosa Parks,” Dove uses the bus as a democratic symbol of the struggle for individual freedom as well as for an inclusive culture.

In *Thomas and Beulah*, awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1987, Rita Dove recreates the lives of her grandparents to document and celebrate the history of an ordinary African American family. The book narrates an important era in African American history: the northward migration of thousands of African Americans in the early decade of the 20th century. Beulah's family moved from Georgia to Akron, Ohio, in 1906; Thomas arrived in Akron from Tennessee in 1921. The migration changed the demographics of both North and South and provided workers for northern industry, contributing to the urbanization of northern cities. The lives of Dove's grandparents mirror the circumstances of their times, such as the depression, racism, and World War II. Because she is black, Beulah irons dresses in the back of the dress shop and is not allowed to sell dresses to the white customers. It’s the consciousness that looks the dress, colour, so on which is the matter of culture.

CHAPTER- 3

Culture in Relation to Dove's Poetry

3.1. Dove's Poetry: Reflection of African-American Culture

Looking back to the African American cultural history, it is nearly all of Rita Dove's poetry deals with classical feature of poetry. We can see great effect of canonic poets such as: Shakespeare, Boccaccio, and Dove's grandparents are topics of her poetry. Dove puts a light on the small truths of life that have more meaning than the actual historical facts. In a time when African-American poetry has been criticized for too much introspection, Rita Dove has taken an approach to emotion and the person as human. Dove's poetry is not about being black, but about being alive.

Dove appreciates the strength of black speech as essential to the American way. As far as African-American poets are concerned, Dove definitely believes the folk element of the black language is a creation of their own tradition. Dove's poetry, similarly, is rooted in song and is different from Caucasian Poetry. Dove, as a black poet, seems to have taken the ideas of the white literary world, and interpreted them in the culture of the black people. Dove's roots are in Africa, though she does not mind dealing with universally-minded issues; she has no trouble working around the conflicts of a multi-cultural society like that of America. Her poetry is concerned with the pain of the blues.

The most important influence on African-American literature is the idea of an audience. Oral tradition is incredibly important in association with the black audience in their literary lives. Interestingly, Dove has made a decision to write in choice of colloquialisms rather than the Standard English preferred by white poets. Most black poets have alternated between styles because they find themselves speaking to dual audiences.

In "Fifth Sunday," Rita Dove has a quality that is obviously African-American. The short stories contained herein are about adolescence and the love of others. Dove also deals with womanhood and sex in a new world; a new country. The kind of language that Dove's

characters use is just like that of a younger Dove and the speech used in African-American churches. “Fifth Sunday” is about the black church and biblical names. The characters in Dove’s stories represent a universal opinion that rhythm is a tradition of black names and stories. In Dove’s poems, she takes average names and raises them to greater importance due to their simple sounding. The major talent of Rita Dove is to write with the authority of a scholar, the modern alertness of a contemporary poet about a form of art too often distracted by professional jargon or literary cliques. Dove has overcome a literary challenge for the common reader of 20th-century poetry.

“Grace Notes” is a good place to analyze Dove’s poetry. In that particular collection are some of her best poems from her earlier days. The language of these poems contain Dove’s cultural awareness and sense of what works with what. The subject matter is universal and her concern for humanity is always present. The importance of these characters and their views never lack universal concern.

Rita dove is one of the most talented poets writing in the English language, as well as one of the most unclassifiable. Delving into forms ranging from the Shakespearean sonnet to the Negro spiritual, Dove has created a vast and ambitious body of work that is equally at home discussing King Herod, the meaning of liberty, or a Saturday night fish fry. Central to her core intellectual mindset, however, is an encyclopedic knowledge of and fervent appreciation for African American history. Her greatest poems not only celebrate black culture, they give voice to its high sophistication of ritual and the bracing circumstances that caused it to be as such. But the most notable thing about Dove’s poetry is her joyous and unfettered sense of self and the bliss that she shows in being comfortable in her own skin and language she use.

3.2. Black Poets on Culture

Since the dominant view holds prideful self-respect as the very essence of healthy African American identity, it also considers such identity to be fundamentally weakened

wherever masculinity appears to be compromised. While this fact is rarely articulated, its influence is nonetheless real and pervasive. Its primary effect is that all debates over and claims to "authentic" African-American identity are largely animated by a profound anxiety about the status specifically of African-American masculinity. As Jones, Kirkland C. in *Language and Literature in the African American Imagination* commented:

> In these days of what is referred to as "global culture," the Nike corporation produces racialized images for the world by elevating the bodies of Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods to the status of international icons. Hollywood too now takes for granted that black bodies can be used to promote both products and style worldwide, and an increasing number of their "black" films are being produced and directed by black men. But despite the multimillion-dollar international trade in black male bodies, and encouragement to "just do it," there is no equivalent in international outrage, no marches or large-scale public protest, at the hundreds of thousands of black male bodies languishing out of sight of the media in the North American penal system. (147)

Between the time that W. E. B. Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk*, discussed in the first chapter, and Danny Glover gained the status of international superstar in the *Lethal Weapon* series of films between 1987 and 1992, the subject of the last chapter, there has been a stark reversal in the nature of the visibility of the black male body, if not much of a change in the fortune of most black men. If the spectacle of the lynched black body haunts the modern age, then the slow disintegration of black bodies and souls in jail, urban ghettos, and beleaguered schools haunts our postmodern times.

The soul of Black Folk traverses this history and asks questions about the nature of the cultural representation of various black masculinities at different historical moments and in different media: literature, photography, film, music and song. It does not seek to be a comprehensive history of the roles of black men in any one of these cultural forms but

considers the cultural and political complexity of particular inscriptions, performances, and enactments of black masculinity on a variety of stages. Each stage is deliberately bounded and limited in its construction.

While contemporary black male intellectuals claim to challenge the hegemony of a racialized social formation, most fail to challenge the hegemony of their own assumptions about black masculinity and accept the consensus of a dominant society that "conceives African American society in terms of a perennial 'crisis' of black masculinity whose imagined solution is a proper affirmation of black male authority." This apparent solution was at work in the Million Man March, but it is also at work in contemporary black intellectual life. On the contrary, rather than continue to dress ourselves in what Essex Hemphill calls "this threadbare masculinity," it is necessary to recognize the complex ways in which black masculinity has been, and still is, socially and culturally produced.

3.3. Colour Pride in Black Culture

Rita Dove herself even speaks of race in order to set herself apart. Placed in the right corner of the photograph of Dove holding an umbrella, she is quoted as saying, "I'm a woman and a black and I write out of that. I think perhaps the woman experience is more important." While recognizing her experience as a female may be more important to her writing, she also recognizes that her "blackness" influences her writing. She is saying what America has been programmed to read about African-American writers because Dove chooses (or the editor chooses to include) that she is black, she is a female. Dove, consciously or unconsciously, recognizes (or is a victim of) America's obsession with race. Dove says, "I want to break down the ivory tower. I want to reduce the anxiety that people have about poetry" (92). While the phrase "ivory tower" can be seen as a negative phrase because of its aloof or escapist connotations, the construction of the phrase gives superiority to whiteness. For even if Dove tries to break down this tower, she must first break down notions in the English language that

references to "white" are more powerful, more impenetrable, and thus superior to "black" references.

As evidenced in picture magazines like people and in the half-page photograph of Dove herself, we are a nation seeking visual pleasure. The colors of black and white in America (as well as culture, language, religion, etc.) determine "race" as a supposed objective, fixed reality. We are a culture of "race" and thus we are a culture of racism. Our language, the English language, is a language of "race" and thus our language is a language of racism. If race as "race" is really a figurative way of encapsulating racism in America, then the use of race as "race" recognizes the racism in and of its language. *The Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* recognizes "race" as a recurring fixture of complexity within American society: "Today race is a feature of American life riven with powerful contradictions and ambiguities; it is arguably both the greatest source of social conflict and the richest source of cultural development in America" (Guerin et al. 254). The disregard of "race" (as racism) in the English language will direct readers towards an ignorance of history, linguistics, and literature (whether multi-cultural or belonging to the canon) altogether. After defining "race" and describing the meaning of "white" and "black" in the English language, I hope to show that because of the historic and linguistic racism presupposed in "race," Rita Dove's attempts to downplay or disregard "race," (while simultaneously heralding black heroes) is an impossibility. In her poem, *Banneker*, not only are her voices determined by "race," but her use of the words "black" and "white" at times support the racist and oppressive conceptions within the English language.

Henry Louis Gates in "Writing, "Race," and the Difference it Makes" speaks of how "race" was defined. Gates notes that "race" was a "thing," a characteristic based upon "natural" differences," "an ineffaceable quantity, which irresistibly determined the shape and contour of thought and feelings as surely as it did the shape and contour of human anatomy." This "thing" called "race," was then seen as a determinant for all other criterion - a person's

biological makeup, language, beliefs, artistic traditions, gene pool, rhythm, athletic ability, cerebration, usury, and fidelity, to name a few.

> Immanuel Kant, a proponent of "race" as a real thing, wrote in 1764 that "so fundamental is the difference between [the black and white] races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color" (qtd. in Gates 1584).

If "race" assumes racism, what is racism? Racism is thinking, acting, and justifying one's actions upon the false notion that "race" exists as race (a real "thing"). It can be said that the primary advocate that sustains racism in America is the English language. Ossie Davis speaks of the English language as his enemy:

> "Racism is a belief that human races have distinctive characteristics, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has a right to rule others. Racism, the English language is my enemy." The English language is a significant carrier of racism as its uses of "black" and "white" become to mean more than color. The uses of "black" and "white" in the English language are so embedded, so prone to seeming almost natural, so richly, stylistically, and freely intertwined within the system of words, that their unequal uses have become unconscious. (73)

Speakers of the English language do not consciously recognize how racially-charged words are, specifically how "black" has negative connotations and "white" positive connotations (and I would even go so far as to say denotations, for what is racism, but a belief in something that is more than a feeling, but a belief in something one believes is fact?)

> "Ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, liberal, even generous habit" but it does nothing to de-racialize a "race"-conscious language. It does nothing to eradicate "race" as real. It does nothing but advocates the use of a language

> that silences and excludes a people living on the margins of a dominant culture (Morrison 257).

In order to prove his ideas that the English language is in fact his enemy, Davis lightly skimmed Roget's Thesaurus of the English Language and found the following. The word "whiteness" has 134 synonyms, 44 being favorable ("purity," "cleanness," "chaste," "innocent," "just," "unblemished," "fair") and only 10 seen as mildly negative ("gloss-over," "pale," "whitewash") (74). The word "blackness," on the other hand, had 120 synonyms, 60 of which were unfavorable ("wicked," "deadly," "unclean," "foul," "obscure") and none even mildly positive. Twenty of the words were directly related to "race," such as "Negro," "nigger," and "darkey" (74-75). Without figuring out percentages, it is obvious that a language (specifically American English here) built upon abstractions like justice, liberty, and equality did not intend to share equal terminology with a "race" "found" to be inferior.

Notions of "black" as negative and "white" as positive go back further than the first publication of Roget's Thesaurus, however. These notions became institutionalized in the language of the Bible and in the language of Shakespeare. Ali A. Mazrui in *Language and Race in the Black Experience: An African Perspective* black as:

> The use of "black" as a metaphor for "evil," "void," and "death" within the English language worldwide. Since Christianity was a religion made victorious mostly through the efforts of white people, as Mazrui argues, then angels became "white" and the devil "black" (104).

"Black" as "void" arises from the idea that blacks had no history, that their continent was living through a "dark age," one of barbarism and primitivism. Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper says, "There is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness . . . and darkness is not a subject of history" (qtd. in Mazrui 107). In both Julius Caesar and MacBeth, Shakespeare equates "black" with "death." In Julius Caesar, the "black sentence" (4.1) was a sentence of death against those associated with the assassination of Caesar. In Macbeth,

Malcolm refers to Macbeth as "black Macbeth" (4.3), suggesting his soul is set on only murder and death.

Rita Dove, a contemporary African-American poet, attempts to reconcile these contradictions between the English language and its African-American speakers by ignoring both notions of race and "race." But like a shadow lingering behind her words, "race" creeps up and demands attention. I believe Dove's attempts to overlook "race" or her critic's applause of her ability to do so is dangerous because it is displays an attitude of indifference to the English language as a carrier of racism. In the long run, Dove is unable to disregard this racism as her voices in *Banneker* are determined by "race" and her sometimes traditional uses of "black" and "white" advocate racism against her own people.

Both critics of Dove and Dove herself comment on her poetry as transcending "race," as speaking to humanity on a universal level, using history as its guise. Arnold Rampersad marks:

> Dove's poetry as unique, as more dignified than "the writers who came just before her" (in the 1960s and 1970s) because "instead of an obsession with the theme of race, one finds an eagerness, perhaps even an anxiety, to transcend - if not actually to repudiate - black cultural nationalism in the name of a more inclusive sensibility" (133).

If Rampersad believes Dove's poetry can evoke a spirit of inclusion, he is unaware of the exclusivity of the English language. And an obsession with "race" (not racism) is a result of the language's obsession with it initially, not a writer's. Dove writes of the black experience, but blurs notions of "race" as insignificant in her poetry. In a 1993 interview with *The Christian Science Monitor*, she said:

> As human beings, we are endowed with this incredible gift to articulate our feelings and to communicate them to each other in very sophisticated ways . . . In writing a poem, if the reader on the other end can come up and say: "I know

what you meant, I mean, I felt that too" - then we are a little less alone in the world, and that to me is worth an awful lot" (17).

I agree with Dove's attempts to presently view "race" as an invisible construct in the sense that she speaks of readers as human beings. Instead of finding differences among her readers, Dove finds "worth" in mutual meaning, mutual feelings. To ignore the sophistication of racism in the English language, however, could make the mutual communication and articulation of feelings that Dove speaks of here impossible or at the least, very difficult.

Ironically, the anonymous English language, however, forces Dove to re-tell the history of Benjamin Banneker with "race"-conscious voices, not voices all human beings could feel "less alone" with. Banneker contains three voice categories - white voices (those of the Baltimore citizens), Banneker's voice as a black man, and Dove's voice, as an omniscient historian and advocate of her "race." Under the auspices of Dove's pen, the white Baltimore citizens are afflicters of negativity upon Banneker's character, as they misunderstand his identity altogether.

"Venerable, the good people of Baltimore / whispered, shocked and more than / a little afraid" (5-7) The white citizens react here as if a black man were not worthy of respect or dignity (especially since they were unaware of both his intelligence and occupation).

"Why else would he stay out / under the stars all night / and why hadn't he married?" (9-11) (Dove mimics what a white person would have said.) Whites cannot understand that a black man would stay out all night except to drink. Thought to be a result of his drinking, Banneker is unmarried. "But who would want him!" (12) (Dove suggests a typical white reaction.) Instead of asking this question, Dove asserts that because of his misperceived life as a single, eccentric drinker, no woman would want to marry him, never mind the community of Baltimore citizens.

"I assure thee, my dear Sir!" (39) This confident, yet wrong response by the white citizens asserts that Banneker had "killed" when in fact he had just "shot at the stars" - an

occupational hazard I suppose. Dove's voice is an advocate for Banneker in that she makes clear Banneker's identity confusion is a result of the white people's shock, fear, and perhaps feelings of intellectual inferiority:

> What did he do except lie
> under a pear tree, wrapped in
> a great cloak, and meditate
> on the heavenly bodies?
> After all it was said
> he took to strong drink. (8-14).
> Neither
> Ethiopian nor English, neither
> lucky nor crazy, a capacious bird
> humming as he penned in his mind
> another enflamed letter" (16-21)

Banneker, to Dove, was simply misunderstood as a drunk vagabond who because he did not belong to Africa or America, did not belong in Baltimore. False rumors and gossip corrupted his image within the community. Resentment was perhaps a factor as Dove describes Banneker as both "capacious" (17), able to contain much knowledge, and like a free "bird" (17) in an environment where slavery encaged many of Banneker's fellow blacks.

We hear little of Banneker's own voice and only secondhand from Dove. He is seen as both a scientific hero and a hero for his people or "race." Dove tells us: "he imagined / the reply, polite and rhetorical," (18-19) after penning an "enflamed" (21) letter to President Jefferson. "A wife? No, thank you (24). (Dove could be predicting Banneker's own words here.) Banneker's thoughts and words are active and heated. He is also realistic in that he predicts Jefferson's reaction to merely be a political, candy-coated response that changes nothing. By rejecting the assumption that he should have a wife, little is learned of

Banneker's own determination in life, but the fact that Banneker can choose one way or the other, says a great deal about a black man living in slavery-ridden America.

Dove's uses of "black" and "white" in the last stanza of *Banneker* are both negatively traditional and refreshingly revolutionary. Dove describes Banneker as a "white-maned figure stalking the darkened breast of the Union" (34-36). As a "white-maned" figure, Banneker is described literally here, as he is probably an older man perhaps possessing wisdom, knowledge, and some authority (as would a male lion). If the phrase is only taken literally, no comments on "race" are warranted. If the combination of "white" and "maned" are dissected, however, one can see how Dove falls into the trappings of "white" as supreme, particularly supremely intellectual. I believe her use of "white-maned" has both positive and negative connotations, for her main character is black, yet he takes on white-controlled traits of dominance (intellectual and social). In addition, Dove's use of "stalking" to describe Banneker's position suggests blackness as "evil."

Dove's discussion of dark elements also has both positive and negative meaning. The Union is described using both nurturing and poisonous terms. The new country is "darkened" (perhaps by its exclusive, elitist language of liberty and justice for all) and yet, it is also described as a breast - perhaps evoking images of a nurturing mother that included the outcast Banneker in their commission to build Washington D. C. Dove's use of nighttime here evokes sentiments of black as "death," but at the same time, the black breast presents a nurturing, protective, and life-giving image.

Many black poets prior to Dove's career were accused of violently using "race" in their writing - writing that became radical, sloppy, and inspired by recklessness (Rampersad 133). While I do not believe Dove is completely unaware of the role of "race" in the English language, her use of the English language will not allow her to speak to humanity as a whole without offending many of its speakers. It is impossible. In *The Black Writer and the Magic of the Word* includes:

> Dove can only use and manipulate the racist English language. Except for the deconstruction of "race," the suggestion to de-racialize terms like "black" and "white," and the creation "of an Afro-American version of English" (Wideman 28).

African American writers do not "belong to English" and yet they "belong nowhere else." I am skeptical of any solution that does not overhaul the whole English language and yet this seems quite a daunting task considering the Bible and Shakespeare are fixed entities. Wideman believes:

> It's not a question of making a little more room in the inn but tearing the building down, letting the tenants know their losses are such that not one is assured of a place, that the notion of permanently owning a place is as defunct as the inn" (29).

Black Pride in America is for African Americans to show their pride as an ethnic group and culturally. Many White teens have a problem with this because they can't say White pride despite the fact that they know their ethnic background and are very hypocritical and I'm starting to think oblivious of the fact that most blacks in America had lost their African heritage and connection with many countries on the continent of Africa. While Whites can still say they have Italian or they are Irish or they are English or they are German. Yet blacks in America had to reinvent a new culture for themselves and this culture is called Black culture thus Black pride.

3.4. Poetic Analysis of Doves Poetry on the Basis of Culture

Anyone bearing a visible difference to the mainstream society cannot decide when to be noticed; attending a party is to bring an active presence to the composition, and there is no relief to being in a crowd. Like most African Americans in academia, it is not unusual for her to be the sole "representative" of her race-and she uses that word deliberately, since often the

gazes she must navigate through will register her as symbol first, especially the gaze from a stranger or someone not very familiar with her.

Her writing process is a bit odd, because her work with lots of fragments (from different poems) for a long time before anything coheres into a presentable piece. She may starts with a line that she know will appear in the middle of the poem, so she writes it down in the middle of the page (college-ruled notebook paper, usually). Other lines may gather around that original, or she may skips to the beginning and work until she stymied, at which point she will turn to another collection of fragments-too early to honor them with the term "draft"--and work on them until she reaches a dead end there, too.

The process is similar to assembling a jigsaw puzzle, and yet she don't skip around willy nilly--she'll tend a particular corner of the poem-to-be until she has exhausted both it and me. In time--days, weeks, months--a draft will emerge, and then another, and another, until she can see the entire picture, and then the polishing begins. It's a nerve-wracking way to work, because she has to dwell in possibility, walking through the valley of the shadow of failure, for a long time before anything happens that others could call Process. But she has found it's the best way for me to cultivate the unconscious connections a bit longer, and it often happens that several poems will complete themselves in the charmed span of a single week about the creativity and writing poems, Dove further comments: The only change in the creative process she has seen with the dance poems comes with the luxury of writing within a framework-each dance has a distinct feel, an imbedded cadence that will suggest a certain shape or silhouette on the page.

That frame, however, can also become a gallows. "Fox Trot Fridays" was the first in the group; it wrote itself rather quickly. After that felicitous birth, she imagined writing a poem about each type of ballroom dance-waltz, tango, quickstep, rumba, cha-cha, mambo, samba, swing, even paso doble. And then, of course, she couldn't write a word, because she was trying to write about dance, not get inside the dance. When she began to appreciate the

technical intricacies of each style-not just the pattern "quick-quick with a / heel-ball-toe" but the rise upon tiptoe that occurs between the slow count and the first quick in fox-trot, for example, or the gradual lowering from tiptoe that one executes in the second half of the third beat in the waltz-only then did *American Smooth* start to shimmer into being. My scaffolding was to provide a humble description of the dance technique-what each part of the body should be doing, measured out precisely, without emotion-in the hopes of finding the poem's true desire, to achieve flight of consciousness, a lifting of the spirit as well as of the human form. The political implications of the American brand of smooth (which allows the partners to do more open work as opposed to the more restrictive international standard), has suggested, in turn, different avenues to pursue in other poems.

For a shy person, such curiosity can be quite terrifying, and therefore, long ago, she seems to have decided to preempt it by making an entrance: shoulders back, smiling, looking several people deliberately in the eye, introducing herself with a handshake--in other words, confronting the observer so there would be no chance to be confronted with any evidence that she was being viewed as "the black woman in the room." In ballroom dancing, however, provoking stares is a good thing. Ego-centrism is the privilege of the dancing couple, who wants all eyes to be trained on them as soon as they cross the threshold." If she is feeling shy, she never wear neutral colors-give me red or lime or turquoise! Her poem *Brown" is edgy*, yes; but she doesn't find it particularly blunt.

The consideration of color-based bias has a nuanced irony; she excuses the dress lady's gaucheries even as she lets us see the meshwork of insecurity / pain / vulnerability that the dress lady's comment has called up. There's defiance, yes-but the reader is never shut out or attacked; rather, the narrator adopts a conspiratorial tone, inviting the reader to see what she's experienced all her life in "polite" society. The "so called" western civilization always afraid from the oral tradition of blacks and tried to dominate it, marginalized it. About this she comments:

> Personally, I find it empowering to be able to trash the High Precepts of Western Civilization-to label the waltz as "that European constipated / swoon," for example--and then to master that canon. Although I prefer the Latin dances, I executed that waltz beautifully . . . I even enjoyed it! Artistically, I want to use all my heritages-sonnet and free verse and oral tradition, Shakespeare and Langston Hughes, classical music and jazz -in the same way that Nat King Cole gave the fox-trot his own brand of smooth. Waltzing in a red dress was part of that rebellion cum mastery. (Dove 87)

Like many contemporary Southern writers, her works often convey the importance of recognizing one's connection to a particular place and the need to remember the past, even--or especially--when that past evokes painful memories. Her grandparents, on whose lives she loosely based the sequence of poems *Thomas and Beulah*, were among the many African Americans who left the south for the north during the Great Migration that occurred during the early twentieth century. Thomas's mandolin playing "preserves and conveys to the next generation of blacks their rich cultural heritage and the communal values which many of them lost when they migrated from the rural south to the industrial north. The poet inherits both her grandmother's transforming imagination and her grandfather's storytelling ability." Dove earned the l987 Pulitzer Prize for Thomas and Beulah, a tribute to her, her grandparents, and to the vitality of the southern African American folk tradition.

As a poet, Dove is an iconoclast and a traditionalist, both in terms of subject and technique. She admires the Western tradition's heroes and heroines, its saints and its artists, but when speculating on the private moments of these individuals, she focuses on their quirks as well as their accomplishments, their sexuality as well as their spirituality.

On occasion, Dove also writes against the grain of the African American literary tradition. “Upon Meeting Don L. Lee,” In a Dream offers an irreverent, even caustic look at one of the most significant writers of the Black Arts Movement of the l960s. The speaker,

presumably Dove, sees "caviar / Imbedded like buckshot between his teeth. / His hair falls out in clumps of burned-out wire" (13-16). But while this dream version of Lee disintegrates, "The music grows like branches in the wind" and the speaker lie down, "chuckling as the grass curls around me" (17-18).

Well-versed in the craft of poetry, sensitive to the nuances of language, rhythm and meter, Dove often revises traditional poetic forms. For example, her experiments with the villanelle and the sestina allowed her to write "Parsley." This poem explores the mind and motives of the genocidal Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo who, on October 2, l957, had 20,000 Black Haitians executed, allegedly because they could not pronounce the letter "r."

In her most recent collection of poems, “Mother Love” (l995), she uses a series of sonnets based on the myth of Demeter and Persephone to grapple with mother daughter relationships. Aware that she does not always strictly adhere to the conventions of the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnet, Dove contends: "Much has been said about the many ways to `violate' the sonnet in the service of American speech or modern love or whatever; I will simply say that I like how the sonnet comforts even while its prim borders (but what a pretty fence!) are stultifying; one is constantly bumping against Order"

Although in “Mother Love” Dove does take liberties with the sonnet form, a transgression she stops just short of confessing, she implies that she retains the sonnet's essence: the ability to create order and to exist as a world unto itself.

When addressing the issues of race and gender, Dove also asserts her artistic independence. "In my poems, and in my stories, too, I try very hard to create characters who are seen as individuals--not only as Blacks or as women, or whatever, but as a Black woman with her own particular problems, or one White bum struggling in a specific predicament--as persons who have their very individual lives, and whose histories make them react to the world in different ways,”

> One could argue that insisting upon that individuality is ultimately a political act, and to my mind, this is one of the fundamental principles a writer has to uphold, along with a warning: don't be swallowed up. Don't be swallowed up ("Vendler").

Dove does not shy away from addressing the effects of race and gender on individual identity. In fact, she often approaches the question of being black and female from an intensely personal perspective. In her autobiographical poems about her daughter, who has the physical characteristics of both her black mother and her white father, Dove reflects on, questions, and celebrates her own experiences as an African American and as a woman.

There are no easy answers to questions of racial and gender identity, as Dove reveals in numerous works. Based on a little known historical incident, “The Transport of Slaves From Maryland to Mississippi” focuses on an enslaved: woman's decision to help a black wagon driver wounded during a violent slave revolt. The speaker helps this individual because "I am no brute. I got feelings. / He might have been a friend of mind" (8-9).

As a result of her assistance, this man rides for help and the slaves are recaptured. Dove relates this woman's story from a detached perspective, leaving questions of morality, betrayal, loyalty, and salvation up to the reader. This poem is one of the many in which Dove gives voice to her interest in "the underside of the story" not in "big historical events." Like many African American writers, Dove treats history with suspicion; she knows that the official records record time, not moments, and only moments provide the real source of truth. Finally, it will be better to note something about the use of poetic devices in the poetry of Rita Dove.

Although, she is conscious with the English language but it gives the lint with Black English. Questions about the English language and race come to mind first: Isn't it ironic that the headline alludes to speakers of "pure English," the Beatles, when describing an African-American woman? When the headline refers to Rita Dove's poetry as lovely, is it also saying

"black is now beautiful?" When the headline refers to Dove's meter as "Rita-made" is the writer suggesting her verse is subversive to or different from the white Shakespearean tradition of poetry? Do the words "put a new face" in the subhead really mean a "new black face?" Does the "Poet Laureate's job" in the subhead presuppose that the post was historically held by whites?

Her writhing style blended the lyricism which derives from her musical background with a fresh sense of movement and rhythm within the poems that owes something to her developed interest and participation in dancing. The flow of the lines in her poetry seems even more subtle, more natural, and more free.

The above mentioned commentary on Rita Dove's poetry has frequently, and correctly, focused upon its graceful phrasing of language. As is often the case for others among our best poets, reviewers have pointed out the lyricism and musicality evident in her carefully crafted lines, even in her more narrative poems. Indeed, given Dove's history as a trained musician and singer, not to mention the associations conveniently suggested by her last name, such comparisons between verse and song, the metrical and the musical, in her works have seemed even more natural parallels for critics to track and spotlight.

In "The Black Dove," a chapter from "Soul Says," Helen Vendler's 1995 book of criticism on recent poetry, Vendler writes:

> "Technically, her poems 'work' by their fierce concision and by an exceptional sense of rhythmic pulse. (Dove used to play the cello, still plays the viola da gamba, and is a trained singer.) No matter how powerful her stories, no matter how sharp-edged her lines, her poems fall on the ears with solace." Certainly, such a summary of Dove's poetic style, with its appropriate tone complemented by her finely tuned voice, provides an acute and accurate assessment for most of the poems presented in the eight collections of poetry published over the last twenty-five years by Rita Dove. (32)

These characteristics could easily be seen in a poem like “The Bird Frau,” an example from Dove's first book, “The Yellow House on the Corner” (1980), which signifies local origin and global village, where readers are offered a quick description of a scene in wartime Europe, "the sun losing altitude over France / as the birds scared up from the fields, / a whirring curtain of flak." (3-6) Dove further uses her lyrical imagery to emphasize how the pain felt by the woman in the poem is exhibited in the poem “The Bird Frau”:

She hung suet from the branches, the air quick
around her head with tiny spastic machinery
—starlings, finches—her head a crown of feathers.
She ate less, grew lighter, air tunneling
through bone, singing
a small song. (12-17)

Dove's former economy and lyric flight are evident in the justly famous “Geometry.” "The house expands,” "windows jerk free,” "ceiling floats,” in the first stanza, comes as metaphor for imagination. As she writes," I prove a theorem and the house expands: /the windows jerk free to hover near the ceiling, /the ceiling floats away with a sigh." (1-3) “Geometry,” in which the analogy between proving a theorem and writing a poem is taken to "where they've intersected," at which point the metaphorical imagination releases the elements "to some point true and unproven.”

In another instance in *The Yellow House on the Corner*, Dove simply records “Notes from a Tunisian Journal” in a series of vivid images:

This nutmeg stick of a boy in loose trousers!
Little coffee pots in the coals, a mint on the tongue.
The camels stand in all their vague beauty—
at night they fold up like pale accordians.
All the hedges are singing with yellow birds! (1-5)

In an endnote from the poem “Parsley,” one of the strongest works from Dove's second collection, “Museum” (1983), the poet reports: "On October 2, 1937, Rafael Trujillo (1891-1961), dictator of the Dominican Republic, ordered 20,000 blacks killed because they could not pronounce the letter 'r' in “Perejil,” the Spanish word for parsley." In this poem, the dictator — haunted by his mother's death, as well as her voice carried on by a parrot — decides the very sound of one's voice, and an inability to sing with a correct inflection, would become an issue which determined each individual's life or death.

Thomas and Beulah, Dove's 1987 Pulitzer Prize-winning collection that loosely explores the lives of her grandparents in a pair of poetry sequences, portrays Thomas's need to express himself through music, as in “Variation on Pain” from the Thomas half of the book titled "Mandolin":

> He lay on the bunk, mandolin
> In his arms. Two strings
> For each note and seventeen
> Frets; ridged sound
> Humming beneath calloused
> Fingertips. (4-9)

In a later poem from Beulah's sequence, titled "Canary in Bloom," in the same collection, the grandmother is depicted placing a canary's cage on the front porch of "The House on Bishop Street," as if a greeting to the outside world and an introduction to the lives within the home, with "strangers calling / from the street Ma'am, your bird / shore can sing!" “Recovery,” a lovely poem near the end of the book brings together the two principals in this long marriage, this couple who have shared a life:

> He was lovely then, a pigeon
> whose pulse could be seen when the moment
> was perfectly still. In the house

the dark rises and whirrs like a loom.

She stands by the davenport,

obedient among her trinkets,

secrets like birdsong in the air. (5-12)

In a 1989 interview with Steven Schneider that first appeared in “Iowa Review,” Rita Dove acknowledges that some sections of a few poems in this collection meant to imitate lyrics to Southern music are invented songs: "I made them up. They are in the spirit of the country blues. They are also influenced by spirituals and gospels." Dove recounts how she wrote the collection of poems with an influence of music, especially blues recordings:

> When I was writing this book I was playing a lot of music, everything from Lightnin' Hopkins to older ones like Larry Jackson or some of the recordings that Al Lomax made of musicians, all the way up to Billie Holliday, stopping about the '50s. It seemed to be the music for the book. ("Schneider")

Dove's style is gripping and alert. It isn't hard to get roped in by it. She's very much a storyteller, entertaining compared to a lot of poets. Such poignant displays of passionate phrasing are few and far between recently, as she attributes this to a lack of general interest in the arts accompanied by disenchantment with engaging in the medium of poetry. Dove's style is on the end of being more accessible. She writes a bluesy brand of poetry.

Dove's impact still lingers on the American scene, echoing from her mainstream eruption of such pieces as *Thomas and Beulah*, which garnered her the coveted Pulitzer Prize in 1987, and “Lady Freedom Among Us,” a passionate piece about what liberty means. But some say the echo can barely be heard these days. Lauren Stetz (sophomore-arts and architecture) believes the shift of focus from art to other areas is the reason for the little attention paid to artistic endeavors.

Unfortunately, people get caught up in science and technology and stop looking at the art that surrounds us. Art still dominates the media. It is in advertisements, computers, the

books we read, the television we watch. Art is still here, people just don't recognize it because it is always changing," Stetz said. Stetz also denounced the notion that there is no point to the arts. People need to realize that although art is not always functional, it does have a purpose. That purpose is to describe the world we live in. Science and data tables can't show emotion.

Whatever, Dove wants to save from criticism of English world; the root grants the gist of Black Culture. The beauty of black, on Blackness, things black, and beautiful; black woman, black man, and language of soul; Language and revolution; Self-hate, rage, the way of violence, Ideology; Separation, integration, violence; black heritage, Songs of the beloved homeland**,** Stolen heritage. Her writing depicts the life of Black, their culture of the past and present and perhaps future too.

CHAPTER-4

Conclusion

Culture: A Conceal Issue in Dove's Poetry

Culture is the patterns of behavior and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share. Culture distinguishes one human group from others. It also distinguishes humans from other animals. A people's culture includes their beliefs, rules of behavior, language, rituals, art, technology, styles of dress, ways of producing and cooking food, religion, and political and economic systems.

Culture is the most important concept in anthropology it is the study of all aspects of human life, past and present. Culture refers to a society or group in which many or all people live and think in the same ways. Likewise, any group of people who share a common culture—and in particular, common rules of behavior and a basic form of social organization—constitutes a society. Thus, the terms *culture* and *society* are somewhat interchangeable. However, while many animals live in societies, such as herds of elk or packs of wild dogs, only humans have culture.

Dove's poems reflect the artistic modernism of 20th-century literature, in which reality gave way to frequent interruptions of fantasy and the writing is characterized consciousness rather than by precise sequences in time. Her poetic form tries to make their writing styles reflect the peculiarities of cultural consciousness in the chaos of the modern world. Her rich with elegant phrasing and words picking idea pulls readers into other lives, Blacks' life and then dazzle them with an often startling mastery of language, which equally draws the attention, wakefulness, and cultural consciousness.

Since Cultural consciousness does not adhere to any single methodology, it is impossible to characterize the field briefly, because these are exceptions to every generalization offered. What one sees most clearly is characteristic tendency, especially the

commitment to examining issues of class, race, and gender. There is also the insistence on expanding the focus of critical inquire beyond traditional high literary culture.

Dove has earned praise for plain spoken poems reflecting her life and the experiences of African-Americans. Her poems still search freedom from white world making black culturally conscious. Dove has the added quality of being able to create extended works entering into and dramatizing the consciousness of those very different from herself. Dove has got many cultural, racial, historical and humanistic types of response. Past commentary on Rita Dove's poetry has frequently, and correctly, focused upon its graceful phrasing of language. As is often the case for others among our best poets, reviewers have pointed out the lyricism and musicality evident in her carefully crafted lines, even in her more narrative poems.

A chief goal of cultural consciousness is to understand the nature of social power as reflected in “texts.” For example, if the object of analysis were a sonnet by Shakespeare, the cultural studies adherent might investigate the moral, psychological and political assumptions reflected in the poem then deconstruct them to see what individuals, social classes, or gender might benefit from having those assumptions perceived as true. The relevant mission of cultural consciousness is to identify both the overt and covert values reflected in a cultural practice. The cultural consciousness critic also tries to trace out and understand the structures of meaning that hold those assumptions in place an give them the appearance of objective representation. Tany analytical technique that helps illuminate these issues is employed.

To understand cultural consciousness, it helps to know a bit about its origins. In the surface we can get lots of idea which doesn't touch the Black in Dove's poetry but when we search the things steps by steps it is deep rooted in Black Culture. Her poems are full of images and imagery which depicts the origin and nature of Black Culture. The cultural critic, does not study fixed aesthetic objects as much as dynamic social processes. The critic’s

challenge is to identify and understand the complex forms and effects of he process of culture.

"Black Consciousness" is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It is based on a self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by seeking to run away from themselves and emulate the white man, they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness expresses group pride and the determination of the black to rise and attain the envisaged self. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude, but if one's mind is so manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his powerful masters. Hence thinking along lines of Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being complete in himself. It makes him less dependent and more free to express his manhood. At the end of it all he cannot tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of his manhood.

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