

Song of Solomon Second Life

Sent: Monday, November 07, 2011 4:48 PM

To: Anatol, Giselle L

If I were trying to convey an important theme to a first time reader of *Song of Solomon*, I would focus on family and getting in touch with one's history. I think that one of Morrison's goals in writing the novel was to tie in important features of family and how one is raised and the impact that it has on an individual. In *Second Life*, I would have Pilate's house-- as you walk in the door, I would have a large room that has a lot of windows since it was described as sunny in the book. I would have newspapers scattered everywhere and the avatars would be able to go over to the papers and read about short stories of the families' history (Solomon and his wife taking flight, Jake being shot protecting his land, Macon evicting tenants, Reba winning in a lottery drawing, Milkman shown with his new found relatives and a tale of a found "history") with dates to give the viewer a sense of time passing. I would have the stove that Pilate cooks over with a pot on the stove, since Pilate was often making wine/food. I would have "A moss-green back hung from the ceiling" and "Candles were stuck in bottles everywhere" (39) to give the reader a sense of the chaos that perpetuates Pilate's life and the lack of order. When you hover over the the candles and bottles, I would have the quote: "Then she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her. When am I happy and when am I sad and what is the difference? What do I need to know to stay alive? What is true in the world? Her mind traveled crooked streets and aimless goat paths, arriving sometimes at profundity, other times at the revelations of a three-year-old" (149). On the walls I would have magazine pictures of white women posing with products such as the ones that Hagar bought and obsessed over. I would have quotes about the products described in the book when you click on the pictures, to give the viewer a sense of what can consume one if they don't "find themselves" and individuate. In the background, I would have the *Song of Solomon* song being sung, so that not only is family and history being viewed, but also conveyed through the song.

Is wine made in a pot? How does one make wine? Since she is a boot legger, fixings for wine might be more appropriate.

Interesting idea!
good interactive element

The large his wife behind strong samples

good

nice choice

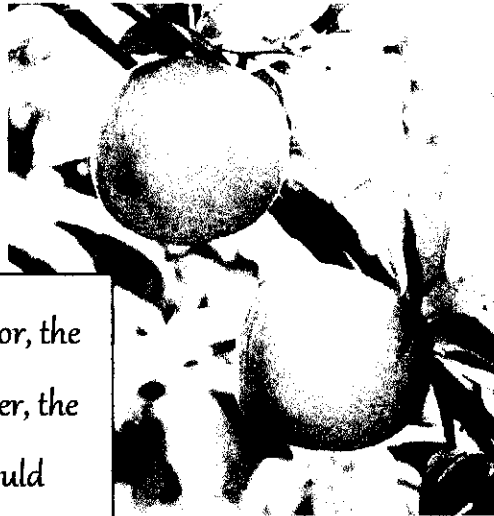
good

good!

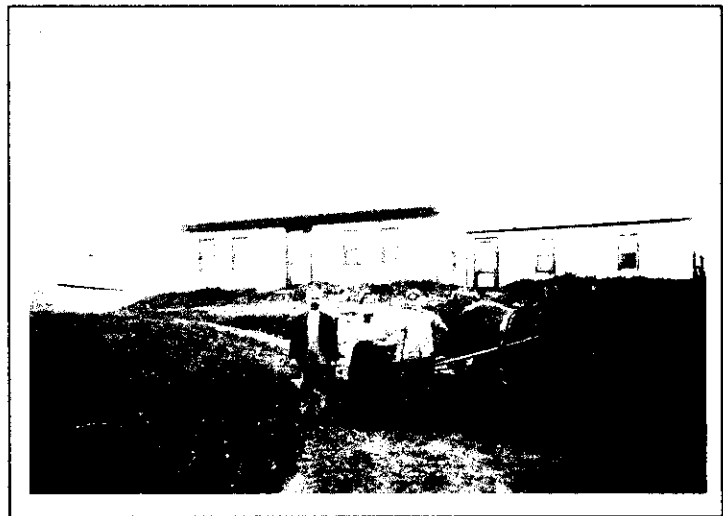
Excellent detail a thoughtful essay.

the verses from the Bible, or the "Sugarman" song that Pilate sings?

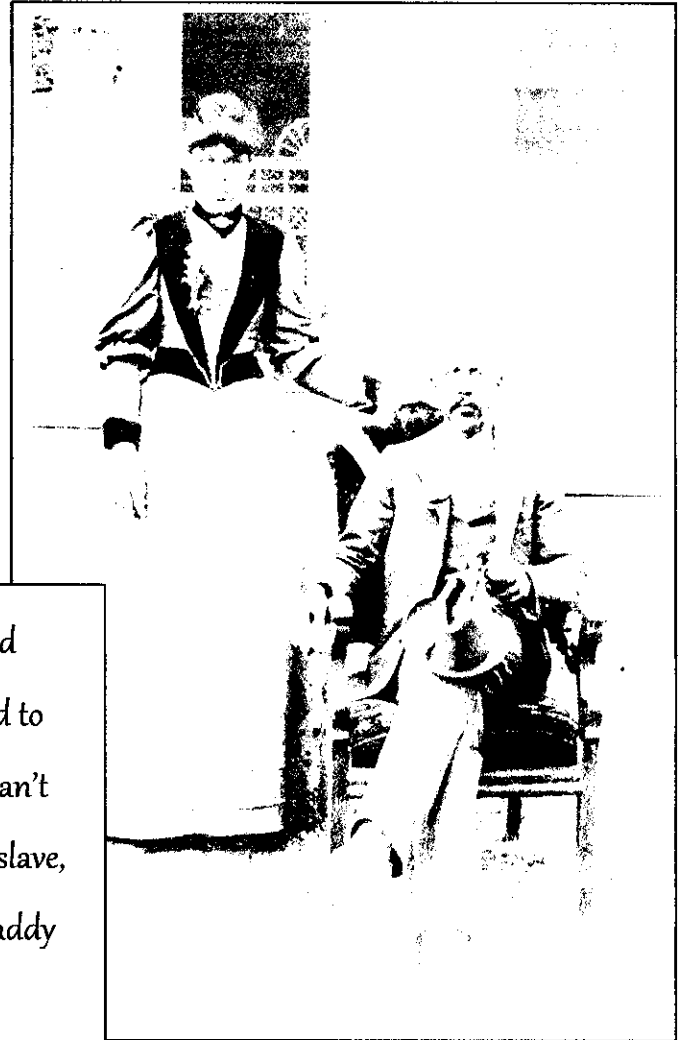
Lincoln's Heaven



"Macon Dead was...the clever irrigator, the peachtree grower, the hog slaughterer, the wild-turkey roaster, the man who could plow forty in no time flat and sang like an angel while he did it. He had come out of nowhere, as ignorant as a hammer and broke as a convict, with nothing but free papers, a Bible and a pretty black-haired wife, and in one year he'd leased ten acres, the next ten more". (pg. 235)

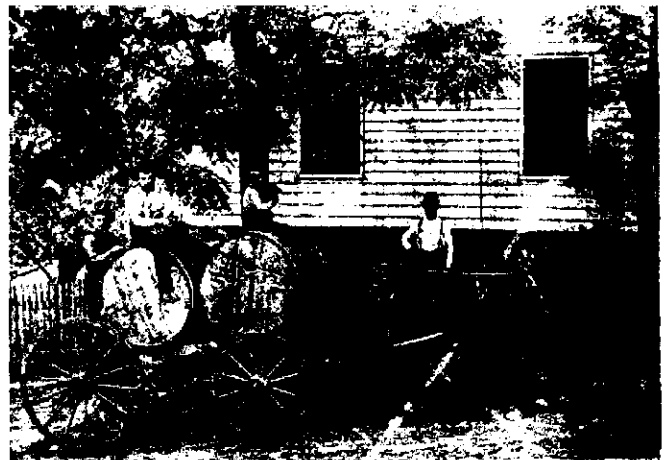


"Take advantage, and if you can't take advantage, take disadvantage. We live here. On this plane, in this nation, in this country right here. Nowhere else! We got a home in this rock, don't you see! Nobody starving in my home; nobody crying in my home, and if I got a home you got one too! Grab it. Grab this land! Take it, hold it, my brothers, make it, my brothers, shake it, squeeze it, turn it, twist it beat it, kick it, kiss it, whip it, stomp it, dig it, plow it, seed it, reap it, rent it, buy it, sell it, own it, build it, multiply it, and pass it on-can you hear me? Pass it on!" (235).



"A farm that colored their lives like a paintbrush and spoke to them like a sermon. 'You see?' the farm said to them. 'See? See what you can do?' Never mind you can't tell one letter from another, never mind you born a slave, never mind you lose your name, never mind your daddy dead, never mind nothing" (235).

"His own father's words came back to him: 'I worked right alongside my father. Right alongside him.' Milkman thought then that his father was boasting of his manliness as a child. Now he knew he had been saying something else. That he loved his father; had an intimate relationship with him; that his father loved him, trusted him, and found him worthy of working 'right alongside' him. 'Something went wild in me,' he'd said, 'when I saw him on the ground.' "(234).



“We had a pond that was four
 acres. And a stream full of fish.
 Right down in the heart of a valley.
 Prettiest mountain you ever saw,
 Montour Ridge”(52).



Four loaded hay wagons underway, before crossing the Charlevoix River. This is the middle photo of three taken by Claude Taylor in the first above High Plains, early 1900s. The final picture, with these same wagons fording the river, appears on the cover and may be seen in more detail on the CD-ROM, #0.01. (Claude Taylor photo) (DBS #6.00)

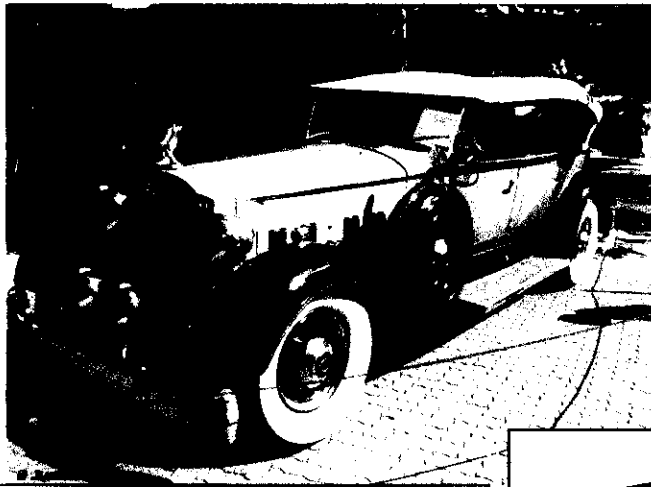
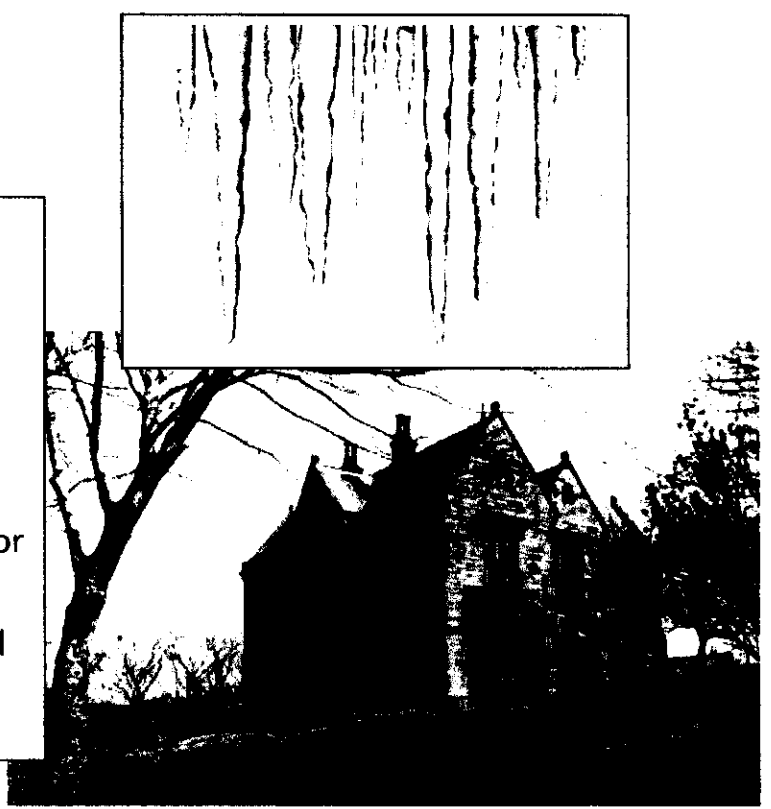
“The more the men talked—the more he
 heard about the only farm in the county that
 grew peaches, real peaches like they had in
 Georgia, the feaststhey had when hunting was
 over, the pork kills in the winter and the work,
 the backbreaking work of a going farm—the
 more he missed something in his life. They
 talked about digging a well, fashioning traps,
 felling trees, warming orchards with fire when
 spring weather was bad, breaking young
 horses, training dogs” (234).



“But they shot the top of his head
 off and ate his fine Georgia peaches.
 And even as boys these men began
 to die and were dying still” (235).

Macon Dead's Home

"The ones who did [hate Ruth], who accepted her invitations to tea and envied the doctor's big dark house of twelve rooms and the green sedan, called him 'peculiar'. The others, who knew the house was more prison than palace, and that the Dodge sedan was for Sunday drives only, felt sorry for Ruth Foster and her dry daughters, and called her son 'deep' "(10).



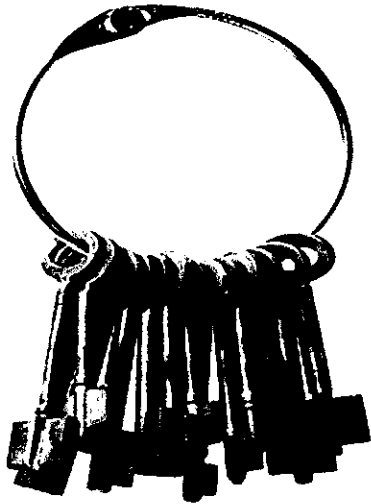
"These rides the family took on Sunday afternoons had become rituals and much too important for Macon to enjoy. For him it was a way to satisfy himself that he was indeed a successful man....Some of the black people who saw the car passing by sighed with good-humored envy at the classiness, the dignity of it. In 1936 there were very few among them who lived as well as Macon Dead. Others watched the family gliding by with a tiny bit of jealousy and a whole lot of amusement, for Macon's wide green Packard belied what they thought a car was for" (31-32).



"Solid, rumbling, likely to erupt without prior notice, Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her. The disappointment he felt in his daughters sifted down on them like ash, dulling their buttery complexions and choking the lilt out of what should have been girlish voices. Under the frozen heat of his glance they tripped over doorsills and dropped the salt cellar into the yolks of their poached eggs" (10).

Macon Dead's Office

"Macon Dead dug in his pocket for his keys, and curled his fingers around them, letting their bunchy solidity calm him. They were the keys to all the doors of his houses (only four true houses; the rest were really shacks), and he fondled them from time to time as he walked down Not Doctor Street" (17).



"When he was first married he used to talk about Lincoln's Heaven to Ruth. Sitting on the porch swing in the dark, he would re-create the land that was to have been his. Or when he was just starting out in the business buying houses, he would lounge around the barbershop and swap stories with the men there. But for years he hadn't had that kind of time, or interest" (52).



'Your rent is four dollars a month, Mrs. Bains. You two months behind already.'

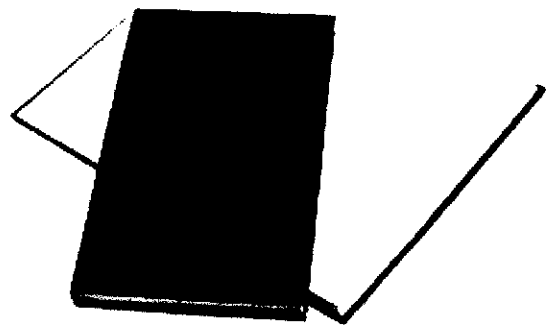
'I do know that, Mr. Dead, sir, but babies can't make it with nothing to put in they stomach.'

'Can they make it in the street, Mrs. Bains? That's where they gonna be if you don't figure out some way to get me my money.'

'No, sir. They can't make it in the street. We need both, I reckon. Same as yours does.'

'Then you better rustle it up, Mrs. Bains. You got till'—he swiveled around to consult the calendar on the wall—'till Saturday coming. Saturday, Mrs. Bains. Not Sunday. Not Monday. Saturday.'....

When Mrs. Bains closed the door, Macon Dead went back to the pages of his accounts book, running his fingertips over the figures and thinking with the unoccupied part of his mind about the first time he called on Ruth Foster's father. **He had only two keys in his pocket then, and if he and if he had let people like the woman who just left have their way, he wouldn't have had any keys at all**" (21-22).



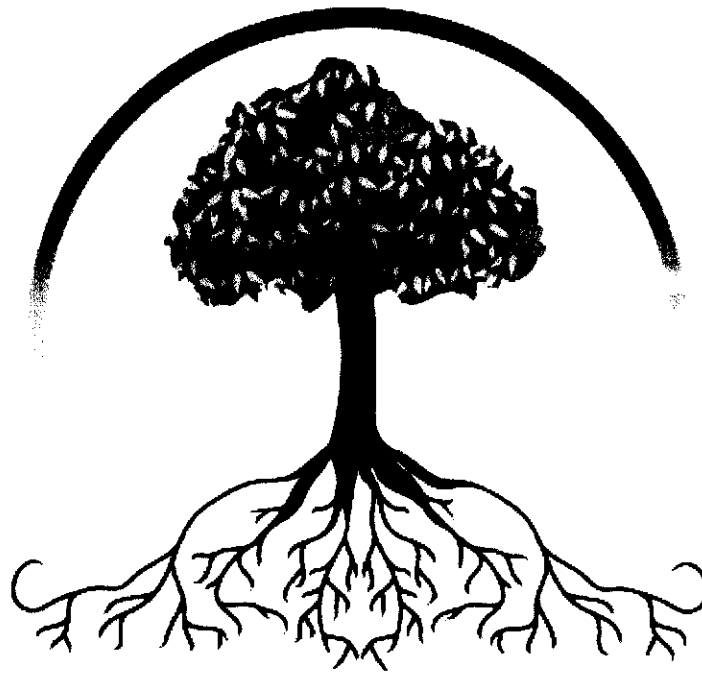
Pictures on the walls in Macon Dead's Home



"Scattered here and there, his houses stretched up beyond him like squat ghosts with hooded eyes. He didn't like to look at them in this light. During the day they were reassuring to see; now they did not seem to belong to him at all—in fact he felt as though the houses were in league with one another to make him feel like the outsider, the propertyless, landless wander" (27).



Milkman's History



Crowell
Bird

Pilate

"This Jake was a baby she found, and he and Sing grew up together, and I guess rather than be packed off to some Quaker school, she ran away with him. You know colored people and Indians mixed a lot, but sometimes, well, some Indians didn't like it—the marrying, I mean. But neither one of them knew their own father, Jake nor Sing. And my own father didn't know his. Heddy never said. I don't know to this day if he was white, red, or—well—what. Sing's name was Singing Bird And my father's name was Crow at first. Later he changed it to Crowell Byrd" (322).

Jake
and Sing

Solomon
and
Ryna

Circe

"Some of those Africans they brought over here as slaves could fly. A lot of them flew back to Africa. The one around here who did was this same Solomon, or Shalimar—I never knew which was right. He had a slew of children, all over the place. ...everybody around here claims kin to hi...Well back to this Jake boy. He was supposed to be one of Solomon's original twenty—one—all boys and all of them with the same mother. Jake was the baby. The baby and the wife were right next to him when he flew off" (322).

Milkman had four people now that he could recognize in the song: Solomon, Jake, Ryna and Heddy, and a veiled reference to Heddy's Indianess. All of which seemed to put Jake and Sing together in Shalimar, just as Circe had said they were. He couldn't be mistaken!" (304).

"Six days after the first Macon Dead died, his children, a twelve-year-old Pilate and a sixteen-year-old Macon Dead, found themselves homeless. Bewildered and grieving, they went to the house of the closest colored person they knew: Circe, the midwife who had delivered them both and who was there when their mother died and when Pilate was named...Circe told them to stay with her until they could all figure out what to do, someplace for them to go. She hid them in that house easily...Circe would bring them food, water to wash in, and she would empty their slop jar" (166)

Creator's Statement

Establishing one's individual identity is an important theme woven throughout Morrison's, *Song of Solomon*. In the novel, Milkman is on a personal journey to sift through his family history in order to find his independence. By gaining knowledge of his ancestry, Milkman is able to better understand the struggles and hardship that his ancestors went through in order to strive for their independence and the journeys they each took.

In order to depict Milkman's self-discovery through finding his ancestral heritage, I would set up two houses in Second Life. The first house would be Jake's Lincoln's Heaven. The second would be Macon Dead II's home. These two homes give the viewer two senses of what one's history and effort can produce—either a dark and cold home or abundance used to bless others. In order to depict these two polarities, I have chosen a variety of pictures and quotes to help the reader sense what Morrison was trying to convey.

For Lincoln's Heaven, I chose images from the late 1800's, early 1900's of farm life and the hardship that accompanied it. Macon Jr. describes Lincoln's Heaven as "a little bit a place" so I chose a smaller farm house with pictures of land around it (51). The quotes chosen depict the hard work that Jake put in to his land and the joy he took in subduing the earth and making it produce. I would have peach trees next to the house, symbolizing the life and growth of the farm.

When the avatar moves over to the trees, they can see the quote, "Macon Dead was...the clever irrigator, the peachtree grower, the hog slaughterer, the wild-turkey roaster, the man who could plow forty in no time flat and sang like an angel while he did it. He had come out of nowhere, as ignorant as a hammer and broke as a convict, with nothing but free papers, a Bible and a pretty black-haired wife, and in one year he'd leased ten acres, the next ten more"(pg. 235). When the

very effective!

also southern/ Georgia roots

avatar moves to go into the house, I would have the door open, unable to be shut in order to ~~open~~ symbolize how Jake's door was always open to the community with a willingness to help. As you step inside the house, there would be the pictures of farming life on the walls, with the remaining quotes shown next to the pictures. Over the door I would have a banner saying, "Nobody starving in my home; nobody crying in my home, and if I got a home you got one too!" to symbolize what Jake was about: hard work and sharing (235).

In juxtaposition, I would have Macon Jr.'s house depicted as dark, large and looming as it is described in the book. When the avatar walks up to the house, the door would be shut. When the avatar goes in, there would be several rooms, all empty and dark except for Macon's "office". This would symbolize that Macon's life revolves around his work and his wealth, not his family. In his office would be his ring of keys, his accounting books and a framed picture on the wall of a fist clenching money. When the avatar touches the keys, the quote, "Macon Dead dug in his pocket for his keys, and curled his fingers around them, letting their bunched solidity calm him. They were the keys to all the doors of his houses (only four true houses; the rest were really shacks), and he fondled them from time to time as he walked down Not Doctor Street" (17). Written in the accounting books would be the quote about Mrs. Bains, in order to show his selfish and harsh nature. When the avatar clicks on the framed photo, the quote about Lincoln's Heaven and Macon Jr.'s lack of interest in thinking about it would pop up. I pair these two because it helps show the shift of Macon's attention from a place of prosperity and generosity to one of a "stern, greedy, unloving man" (234). In the corner of the office I would have lots of money stacked up and chained together with a lock on it. I would do this to help counter what the "empty" house might suggest—poverty. Rather, the Dead's were wealthy but Macon was greedy with his money and kept it for himself.

I would have icicles hanging in all the other rooms to show the "frozen heat of his glance" and the lack of warmth and love in the home (10). On the wall of one of the other rooms I would have the quotes listed on the page titled "Macon Dead's Home". These quotes would help the reader better understand Macon and his home life. In another room I would have the photos of homes depicting poverty in order to help the viewer get a sense of the types of people that Macon was making money off of. The pictures in both Macon and Jake's homes show much of who the men are—Jake reaping from the land and Macon reaping off of people. Although Macon's profession is not one to be condemned, his greedy practices are. The pictures combined with the quotes in the home help show this.

In between Jake and Macon Jr's homes I would have a large tree with a path in front of it, symbolizing the journey Milkman took to get to his family roots and join these two parts of history together. The tree would have large stones around the bottom of it with names of his family members on them. When the avatar touches the rocks, the quotes about the members show up allowing the viewer to gather a short history of Milkman's ancestors. On the tree, I would have the following quote carved "he found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth. Walking it like he belonged on it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there—on the earth and on the place where he walked" (277). I chose this quote to be on the tree because I believe it ties this Second Life scene in really well. Milkman's journey leads him to his families' history and the ultimate lesson he learns: that what we make of life is our choice and can bring about opposing fruits. By learning about his ancestors, Milkman puts down "roots" and is able to begin establishing his own identity.

I chose this particular scene because I think it shows an important aspect in many of Morrison's novels: the importance of establishing one's own identity. In Song of Solomon, Morrison uses Milkman to encourage this in her readers. His journey throughout the book shows him starting out as a limping youngster who is struggling to find an identity outside of two parents he does not relate to. His search initially begins with motives similar to those of his father's—wealth (gold). However, as Milkman continues on his journey, he discovers more and more about his father's history and other ancestors. He begins to understand the dynamics of his past and how it has shaped his father. He sees that his own personal choices will affect his future. The symbols that Morrison uses throughout the novel show Milkman growing and becoming more in touch with his past. I tried to include a good portion of quotes to give a viewer a sense of what Milkman learned on his trip and how he became stronger once knowing where he came from.

I think that by using pictures from the era the book is set in help the viewer become a part of the scene and to see what the characters were seeing. Rather than only reading about the hard work it took to make a farm, seeing the farmer plowing and the tree being chopped down really conveys the effort it took to maintain land. The houses/shacks of Macon Jr's help the viewer get a sense of what living in poverty was like in the 1930's as this is a hard thing to envision without help.

Overall, I think that the scene invites the viewer into the world of Milkman: his past, his present and the journey he takes to discover these and create an identity built on top of them. ✓

Well done!

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Nice selection.