HERTOGFOUNDATION

TONI MORRISON'S

SONG OF SOLOMON



Angel Adams Parham
University of Virginia

Thursdays, 6–8 PM ET
January 7–28, 2027

Humanities at Hertog
Syllabus | Winter 2027

HERTOG WINTER 2027 HUMANITIES SEMINAR

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

Angel Adams Parham, University of Virginia

What is the meaning of "home"? How do memory and forgetting, failure and aspiration shape our understanding of who we are and where we come from?

These are some of the questions at the heart of Toni Morrison's stirring 1977 novel *Song of Solomon*. Filled with history and magic, classic Greek mythology and African culture—Morrison's novel is a taut masterpiece.

Students are invited to spend four weeks together plumbing the depths of this beautiful and complex work.

Meeting Schedule: Thursdays, January 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2027, from 6–8 p.m. ET. Online.

Course Materials

- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (Vintage International), ISBN 978-1-4000-3342-3.

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will write one two-page, single-spaced paper during the course for one assigned session, responding to a discussion question provided by Professor Parham. Papers should include page numbers for textual citations and be posted on Slack by 5 p.m. ET the day before the assigned session. Paper arguments may be used in discussion.

Thursday, January 7, 2027

6:00–8:00 p.m. ET Session I

Reading

- *Song of Solomon, Chapters 1–4*

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of naming for the various characters?
2. Compare and contrast the characters and households of Macon Dead II and Pilate. What does each seem to most care for and represent? What ways of being in the world do they present to us?
3. Why does Macon Dead II tell the story of Lincoln's Heaven? What does Lincoln's Heaven represent for Macon? What did it represent for his family?
4. What story is Morrison telling us about socioeconomic class in the different social and material backgrounds of the characters? How do these differences matter?

Thursday, January 14, 2027

6:00–8:00 p.m. ET **Session II**

Reading

- *Song of Solomon, Chapters 5–9*

Discussion Questions

1. How do love, lack of love, and the search for love shape the various characters? Choose two characters and compare and contrast what love means to them.
2. What is the understanding of death for the different characters? How does their understanding of death affect or shape how they live their lives?
3. Consider Guitar's transformation. What is the philosophy of life and philosophy of history underlying the Seven Days society Guitar has joined? Why is Guitar attracted to it and why is Milkman repelled by it?
4. How do we see the living relating to the dead? How does it change or shape the story to have the dead be so active within it? What is the significance of the Dead family name?
5. There is some powerful symbolism going on in the cave scene where Pilate and Macon Dead II find a treasure and see their father. What's happening here at various lived and symbolic levels?

Thursday, January 21, 2027

6:00–8:00 p.m. ET **Session III**

Reading

- *Song of Solomon, Chapters 10–12*

Discussion Questions

1. Who is the woman Milkman meets in the old Butler home? Is she living? Is she dead? What do you make of her?
2. What is the significance of Circe's golden-eyed dogs?
3. What is Milkman truly looking for in Shalimar? What does he find?
4. What's happening at the end of chapter 12, when Milkman begins to really listen to the children's song? What is the significance of his having to memorize the song because he can't write it down?

Thursday, January 28, 2027

6:00–8:00 p.m. ET **Session IV**

Reading

- *Song of Solomon, Chapters 13–15*

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Milkman insist on swimming near the end?
2. What does Milkman mean when he says that Pilate could fly without leaving the ground?
3. What is the significance of flying in the novel?
4. Why does Guitar do what he does? Why does Milkman respond in the way he does?
5. How does the end of the novel transform your understanding of the first part of the novel?