

**SLAVERY AND THE QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN COLSON WHITEHEAD'S
THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD AND YAA GYASI'S *HOMEGOING***

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BENIN CITY,**

OCTOBER 2025

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENT OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONS)
DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE**

OCTOBER 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project titled: **SLAVERY AND THE QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN COLSON WHITEHEAD'S *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD* AND YAA GYASI'S *HOMEGOING***, was undertaken by **Chinedu David OKEKE** of the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, with Matriculation Number **ART2100295** under my supervision.

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DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, the source of my wisdom and strength. It is also dedicated to Mr. Johnnie Asomba and Late. Mrs Bridget. N. Asomba, and loved ones whose sacrifices, care, and encouragement made this achievement possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank Almighty God for His guidance and strength throughout the completion of this project. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, Prof. Mrs. A. O. Eruaga, for her valuable advice, encouragement, and support. I also appreciate all my lecturers in the Department for their dedication and contribution to my academic growth.

My special thanks go to my uncles, Mr. Dennis A. Asomba and Mr. Basil O. Asomba, and to all members of the Asomba family for their love and support throughout my education.

My deepest appreciation goes to my lovely mother, Mrs. Ekene Okeke, for her constant encouragement and prayers; to my elder sister, Mrs. Esther C. Asomba, for everything she has done for me; and to my sister, Miss Sonia A. Okeke, for her care and support.

I am also grateful to my coursemates, Peter, Chineme, Shegun, Jennifer, Temi, Sarah, and Chiefoe; for their encouragement and assistance. Finally, special thanks to my dear friend and sister, Bernice, for her unwavering support.

Thank you all for your love, prayers, and understanding during this period. Your support has been a great source of motivation and inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the theme of slavery and the quest for freedom in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. It analyses how both authors use narrative techniques and characterisation to portray the struggles and resilience of enslaved Africans and their descendants. The research shows that freedom, in both novels, goes beyond physical liberation to include emotional and psychological emancipation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how *The Underground Railroad* and *Homegoing* in order to portray the experiences of slavery and the struggle for freedom. It aims at exploring how the characters in both novels resist oppression and search for personal and collective liberation. This study also seeks to highlight the emotional, physical, and psychological impact of slavery and how the theme of freedom is expressed across different generations and settings.

1.2 Scope of Study

This research focuses on two contemporary novels: *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead and *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi. It explores the major characters, plot developments, and historical settings that illustrate the realities of slavery and the desire for freedom. The study covers themes such as resistance, identity, generational trauma, and survival, as they appear in the selected texts. It does not include other literary works or historical accounts outside these novels.

1.3 Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative literary analysis. The approach involves close reading of the two novels to identify key themes, symbols, and character development related to slavery and freedom. Secondary sources such as scholarly articles, reviews, and critical essays are also used to support the analysis. The study draws on postcolonial and African American literary theories to provide deeper insights into the texts.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The topic of slavery and the quest for freedom in African American literature has long been analyzed through various critical lenses. For this study, the main theoretical frameworks are Postcolonial Theory, Trauma Theory, and New Historicism. These theories help in understanding the historical, emotional, and psychological weight carried by the characters in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. The novels are set against the backdrop of slavery, colonialism, and racial discrimination, all of which continue to shape the Black experience in America and the African diaspora.

1.4.1 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory focuses on the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It explores how formerly colonised people resist domination, reclaim their culture, and rebuild identity. The theory was developed by scholars such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha,

and Gayatri Spivak. Said's concept of Orientalism discusses how the West created distorted images of the East to justify control, which can also be applied to how enslaved Africans were dehumanised.

In *Homegoing*, the legacy of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade are central. The novel traces the lives of two half-sisters and their descendants through generations from 18th century Ghana to modern day America. The colonial system disrupts families, erases culture, and enforces European dominance, leaving psychological scars. Similarly, *The Underground Railroad* reimagines the historical escape network as a literal train system, highlighting the lasting trauma and resistance of enslaved people. The characters navigate spaces controlled by white power, yet continually seek liberation and identity. Postcolonial theory helps in analysing how these texts portray the lasting effects of colonial oppression on both sides of the Atlantic.

1.4.2 Trauma Theory

Trauma theory, influenced by scholars like Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, helps us to understand how individuals and communities process extreme suffering. Slavery is a collective trauma, and its effects span generations. The novels under study show how trauma is not just experienced directly, but also inherited. In *The Underground Railroad*, Cora's trauma is not just from the physical abuse she suffers, but also from the emotional pain of being abandoned by her mother, hunted by Ridgeway, and losing the people she trusts. Whitehead uses non-linear narrative and fragmented memories to show how

trauma disrupts time and identity.

In *Homegoing*, each chapter shows a new character dealing with the effects of slavery or colonisation. The trauma is passed down: the pain of imprisonment, loss, and racism appears again and again, even in the lives of characters who are born free. This connects with the idea of intergenerational trauma that pain can be inherited in both emotional and cultural ways.

Trauma theory highlights how healing and identity can come from storytelling, remembering, and connecting to one's roots. Both authors use fiction to revisit history, not to change it, but to honour it and show the human cost.

1.4.3 New Historicism

This research adopts New Historicism as its theoretical framework to examine the theme of the quest for freedom in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. Emerging in the 1980s through the work of Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism emphasizes the relationship between literature and the historical and cultural contexts in which it is produced. It views literary texts not as isolated artistic works but as part of a larger network of power, ideology, and social discourse.

New Historicism is particularly relevant for texts dealing with slavery and freedom because it allows for an exploration of how literature reflects and responds to the social, political, and economic forces of its time. Though both Whitehead and Gyasi are

contemporary writers, their novels engage deeply with historical experiences of slavery, colonialism, and systemic oppression. Using New Historicism, this study explores how these novels reconstruct the past not as objective history but as a cultural text shaped by memory, trauma, and the continuing legacy of racial injustice.

Central to New Historicism is the idea that literature and history are interdependent texts: just as literature can help us understand the power structures and ideologies of a specific era, historical events and records must also be read with an awareness of their rhetorical and cultural construction. This theory also draws on Michel Foucault's concepts of discourse and power, especially in analyzing how institutional forces such as slavery, religion, and law influence the characters' lives and their pursuit of freedom.

By focusing on both canonical and non-canonical materials including slave narratives, colonial documents, oral traditions, and social histories this study examines how *The Underground Railroad* and *Homegoing* participate in rewriting history from the margins. The New Historicist approach allows for a critical reading of how these novels use fiction to fill in historical silences and challenge dominant historical narratives.

In applying this framework, the research highlights how Whitehead and Gyasi, through literary imagination, not only depict the brutal realities of slavery but also emphasize the enduring human desire for liberation, identity, and self-determination, thus making the theme of freedom both a personal and collective journey.

Together, postcolonial theory, trauma theory, and New Historicism provide a rich lens through which to analyze *The Underground Railroad* and *Homegoing*. These novels are more than historical fiction; they are literary acts of remembrance, resistance, and healing. They show how fiction can tell the truth about a painful past and point toward the possibility of freedom, identity, and justice.

1.5 Review of Related Literature

Some detailed analysis of Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* by some scholars include; Valerie Babb, André Naffis-Sahely, Jennifer Williams, Cheryl Higashida, and Natasha Trethewey.

These scholars examined the effect of slavery on the African American community. These scholars noted that the portrayal of slavery and the quest for freedom remain a central theme in African American and African diasporic literature. Writers often revisit the era of slavery not just as a historical reality, but as a source of generational trauma, cultural memory, and resistance. In this context, Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016) and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) stand out as significant contemporary novels that reimagine the legacy of slavery across different periods and regions. Both have received wide scholarly attention for their narrative innovation and deep engagement with slavery's impact on identity, freedom, and history.

In *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead reimagines the real-life network that helped enslaved people escape into a literal train running underground. Valerie Babb explains that this symbolic transformation allows Whitehead to explore the inner and outer journeys of escape and survival (Babb 45). The novel follows Cora, a young enslaved woman who moves through various states, each reflecting a different historical attitude toward race and oppression. Critics such as André Naffis-Sahely emphasise that Whitehead's episodic structure shows how the path to freedom is not linear, but full of uncertainty, betrayal, and danger (Naffis-Sahely 78). The novel presents slavery as not just a legal condition, but a system that aims to erase memory, identity, and hope.

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* offers a broader intergenerational perspective. The novel traces the family lines of two Ghanaian half-sisters, Effia who remains in Africa, and Esi, who is sold into slavery and shipped to America. Each chapter follows a descendant of one of the sisters, highlighting the long-lasting effects of slavery, colonisation, and systemic racism. Jennifer Williams praises the novel as "a powerful exploration of the diaspora and the weight of historical trauma" (Williams 60). According to Cheryl Higashida, Gyasi's work demonstrates how the scars of slavery persist over generations, even when they are not always visible (Higashida 102). The novel emphasises memory, cultural loss, and the struggle to reclaim identity in both Africa and America.

Comparative scholarship has noted the shared themes between *The Underground Railroad* and *Homegoing*. Natasha Trethewey argues that both authors use personal narratives and historical fiction to “reclaim Black voices and reveal the psychological burden of inherited trauma” (Trethewey 89). While Whitehead focuses on the violence of escape and pursuit, Gyasi centers the slow, painful aftermath and the search for connection and healing. Together, the novels present slavery not as a closed chapter of history, but as a living memory that continues to shape the present.

Both novels can also be interpreted through Paul Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic, which views the African diaspora as a shared cultural and historical space of resistance and transformation. Whitehead and Gyasi contribute to this framework by showing how African and African American identities are shaped by the transatlantic legacy of slavery, but also by resilience and the pursuit of freedom. Ultimately, these novels argue that freedom is not simply the absence of bondage, but an ongoing process of recovery, resistance, and self definition.

1.6 Thesis Statement

This essay explores slavery, the quest for freedom and the literary devices deployed in Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* to demonstrate that these texts are not historical but literary works.

CHAPTER TWO

SLAVERY

2.0 Introduction

Slavery remains one of the darkest chapters in human history, and in literature it is explored not only as a historical system but as a lived experience with deep emotional and generational consequences. Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* portray slavery as a force that shapes identity, destroys family structures, and leaves long-lasting scars.

Whitehead and Gyasi use narrative devices such as symbolism, imagery, foreshadowing, characterisation, and shifting settings to present slavery as both a physical and psychological condition. Slavery extends beyond chains and plantations; it appears in laws, institutions, and structures designed to control Black existence. Yet within these narratives lies resistance the continual human struggle for dignity and emancipation.

Through personal and intergenerational narratives, both novels illuminate how slavery is not a closed historical chapter but a continuing legacy influencing contemporary realities.

2.1 Slavery in *The Underground Railroad*

Whitehead presents slavery as a system of relentless dehumanisation. The Randall plantation in Georgia serves as a primary setting where humans are treated as property a

narrative device showing setting as oppression. The two plantation owners reveal contrasting forms of cruelty. James is cold and economically driven, while Terrance enjoys violent spectacles. In Terrance's world, punishment becomes theater. "Terrance liked to have slaves fight for his amusement" (18). This quote illustrates violence as performance, reinforcing Whitehead's critique of slavery as a sadistic institution.

Characterization as a Survival Mechanism

Cora's character embodies resistance shaped by loneliness and inherited trauma. Whitehead uses backstory (a background information about a character or event that explains past experiences) as a narrative device. He uses the memory of Ajarry's capture and Mabel's escape to show how trauma passes through generations. Cora's social isolation on the plantation is an example of psychological slavery, not just physical bondage. The author uses imagery and violence as control mechanism. The punishment of Big Anthony is described using graphic imagery, reminding readers how fear governed enslaved bodies: "They beat him and burned him before the eyes of everyone" (56). This spectacle becomes symbolic terror intended to erase hope of freedom. Likewise, Cora's distrust of others shows how tension becomes a survival mechanism: "Cora never trusted anyone on the road. Trust was a luxury she could not afford" (105).

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of objects, characters, or actions to represent deeper meanings or ideas beyond their literal sense.

In The Underground Railroad

Whitehead transforms the historical network into a literal underground train system this is a powerful symbol of hope and resistance for example:

“The rails had been laid by those who would never see the light” (80). The tunnel becomes a metaphor for the hidden journey to liberation, yet its darkness symbolises the uncertainty of escape. (80). The railroad itself also symbolises collective struggle and the strength born from unity. It connects the enslaved people’s courage across time and space, showing how their hope continues to move beneath the surface of oppression. The darkness of the tunnel represents both fear and faith the belief that freedom lies somewhere at the other end. Whitehead extends this symbolism when Cora steps out of the darkness into an unknown land: “She emerged into the daylight, unsure if she was free or still pursued by the world she fled” (Whitehead 91). This moment captures how freedom in the novel is never absolute, it is fragile, uncertain, and must be constantly pursued.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a literary technique where the writer gives hints or clues about what will happen later in the story.

In *The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead uses foreshadowing to show that freedom is never guaranteed. Ridgeway's relentless pursuit foreshadows that freedom is never secure. His belief in the "natural order" (93) symbolizes white supremacy defending itself and the continued grip of oppression even beyond the plantation. He becomes a living reminder that the system of slavery adapts and continues to chase those who flee it. Through him, Whitehead shows that even outside the plantation, the reach of oppression remains strong. Cora's constant fear of being captured reflects how the past refuses to let go of the present.

This sense of danger is foreshadowed early in the novel when Cora and Caesar first plan their escape: "If you stay, you die. If you run, they'll catch you" (58). The statement predicts the violent chase that follows and reveals the hopeless cycle faced by the enslaved. Whitehead uses this to show that slavery's grip extends beyond physical chains it survives through fear, pursuit, and control.

Violence as a motif

A motif is a recurring element in a story such as an image, word, symbol, object, or idea that keeps appearing and helps develop the main themes.

In *The Underground Railroad* Colson Whitehead uses violence as a recurring motif to show that freedom always comes at a cost. Everywhere Cora travels, danger follows showing a motif that freedom requires constant resistance. Even when the Valentine farm promises peace and community, its destruction proves the persistence of oppression. Through Cora's journey, Whitehead insists that although slavery intends to break the enslaved, the will to resist endures. Violence appears repeatedly as both punishment and warning, used by the white world to enforce control. Early in the novel, Cora witnesses a man burned alive for trying to escape: "The fire crackled and took him piece by piece" (14). This brutal image foreshadows the cruelty that follows her across states. Later, when the Valentine farm is attacked, Whitehead writes, "The gunfire came from all sides, cutting down men and women who only wished to live free" (292). These scenes of violence reveal how deeply oppression is woven into society, turning every place of hope into a battlefield. Yet despite the bloodshed, Whitehead portrays Cora's survival as an act of defiance proof that the human spirit can endure even the most violent attempts to destroy it.

2.2 Slavery in *Homegoing*

In *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi portrays slavery not as a single experience but as a system whose effects stretch across centuries. The novel shows how the wounds of enslavement, colonialism, and racism shape generations of a single family. Through a multi-generational narrative structure, Gyasi connects the fates of people on both sides of the Atlantic from the Gold Coast of Africa to modern America revealing that the trauma of slavery does not end with emancipation but is carried forward through memory, silence, and inherited pain.

Gyasi begins with the family split between Effia and Esi, two half-sisters whose destinies symbolise the two major paths of African history under slavery. Effia is married to a British officer at Cape Coast Castle, while Esi is imprisoned in the dungeons beneath that same castle before being shipped across the Atlantic. This cruel separation becomes a powerful symbol of the fractured African family the divide between those who remained in Africa and those taken away to the Americas. The castle itself stands as a metaphor for colonial power and moral contradiction, a place where British officers live comfortably above while suffering and inhumanity persist below.

Through Effia's descendants, Gyasi explores the effects of slavery on African societies the rise of local complicity, the transformation of traditional values, and the scars left by colonialism. Through Esi's descendants, she examines the African American experience from the brutality of plantation life and racial segregation to the struggles of identity, inequality, and self-discovery in the modern world. Each chapter in *Homegoing* reveals how the past echoes in the present. The characters' lives are linked by generational pain but also by resilience and hope.

By tracing this family lineage over three hundred years, Gyasi transforms slavery from a historical event into a living memory that continues to shape identity and destiny. In this way, *Homegoing* insists that freedom is not merely the absence of chains but the ongoing effort to heal from the deep wounds of history.

Setting as Contrast and Critique

Contrast means showing the differences between two or more things, while critique means giving a careful judgment or analysis of a work. In *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi uses setting as both contrast and critique to expose the hypocrisy of colonialism and the moral blindness that sustained slavery. The most striking example is the Cape Coast Castle, where the castle above and the dungeons below reflect two opposing worlds of slavery.

Above, there is luxury, wealth, and denial of guilt, below, there is suffering, silence, and inhumanity. The very structure of the castle becomes a metaphor for colonial hypocrisy,

power built directly upon human misery.

Gyasi describes this shocking divide when she writes, “The soldiers would walk above, laughing and drinking, while below, the women cried and wailed in the dark” (27). This contrast between comfort and torment critiques the inhuman system that allows cruelty to exist beside civility.

Another example of contrast and critique appears when Effia, who lives in the castle as the wife of a British officer, remains unaware that her sister Esi is imprisoned beneath her. Gyasi notes, “Sometimes, at night, Effia could hear the strange sounds from the dungeons below, but she did not ask what they were” (31). The irony and contrast here show the psychological distance between those complicit in oppression and those suffering under it. Through this setting, Gyasi critiques not only colonial exploitation but also human denial the way privilege blinds people to the pain their comfort is built upon. The novel’s imagery strengthens this critique. Gyasi uses sensory images such as the smell of sweat, the iron of chains, and the damp of stone walls to make history feel immediate. The dungeons represent buried pain, while the ocean Esi crosses becomes a symbol of forced migration and cultural dislocation. Through setting as contrast and critique, *Homegoing* exposes how spaces themselves castles, plantations, and prisons carry the weight of history. These places become reminders that the quest for freedom begins by confronting the truths buried beneath power and comfort.

Motif of Fire and Water

A motif is a recurring element in a story such as an image, word, symbol, object, or idea that keeps appearing and helps develop the main themes. In *Homegoing*, fire and water appear repeatedly as powerful, opposing forces that shape the fate of generations. Fire often represents destruction, loss, and cleansing, while water stands for movement, memory, and renewal.

Fire destroys Effia's lineage but is also tied to survival and transformation. When Effia's mother sets fire to their family hut, it marks the beginning of Effia's separation and symbolises how violence becomes part of her family's legacy. Gyasi writes, "The fire burned everything Effia had ever known, leaving behind only smoke and the smell of change" (11). This image of burning connects destruction with the painful birth of a new identity. Similarly, when Akua, one of Effia's descendants, becomes haunted by dreams of fire, it shows how inherited trauma continues to consume each generation. Akua says, "The firewoman came to me again, her hair blazing, her eyes full of the past I could not escape" (173). Fire in these moments becomes both punishment and a reminder of

history's inescapable scars.

Water, in contrast, carries Esi into bondage but later comes to symbolise return and healing. Esi's capture and the Middle Passage begin with water, as the ocean becomes the path of displacement and pain. Yet by the end of the novel, when Marjorie and Marcus descendants of Effia and Esi stand at the Atlantic shore, water transforms into a symbol of reconnection. The sea that once separated the sisters now unites their bloodlines, suggesting that healing is possible through remembrance.

Through the motifs of fire and water, Gyasi shows how suffering and endurance coexist. Fire consumes, but water restores, both reflect the novel's central idea that from destruction can come renewal, and from pain can rise resilience.

Narrative Structure and generational perspective

Narrative structure refers to the way a story is organized or arranged how the author chooses to tell the story through time, characters, and events. While generational perspective allows readers to see how history passes down trauma, memory, and identity from one generation to the next. Gyasi shifts narration across generations and continents. This device allows readers to see How slavery evolves into new forms such as segregation, mass incarceration, and racism showing How freedom is pursued differently by each generation.

Irony as Social Critique

Irony means a situation or expression where the opposite of what is expected happens or is meant. It shows a contrast between appearance and reality. In *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi uses irony to expose the moral contradictions of slavery and colonialism. The novel shows how the very system built to give power and wealth to a few ends up destroying them from within. Quey and James who are the descendants of colonizers struggle deeply with identity and belonging. The irony is that the supposed beneficiaries of slavery are also psychologically haunted by its legacy, proving that slavery corrupts both sides of history. For example, when Quey realises that his father's wealth and influence come from the suffering of others, Gyasi writes, "He did not know what it meant to be half of anything, not African, not British, just something else entirely" (69). The irony here is that the man born into privilege feels more lost and divided than those who were enslaved. His advantage becomes his burden.

Another clear moment of irony comes later when James, Quey's son, chooses to reject the very trade that made his family powerful. Gyasi notes, "James Collins ran from the very thing that had given him his name" (93). This is ironic because his freedom depends on turning away from the legacy that was meant to secure his future. Gyasi uses this to criticise how colonial wealth and power are built on moral emptiness and guilt.

The quest for freedom runs through the novel. Even when physical chains are gone,

characters still struggle against systems designed to oppress them. He sought legal freedom after enslavement, Willie fought against racial injustice in America, and Marcus confronted the trauma buried in his family's history. Their journeys show that freedom is not a single event but a continuous struggle across generations.

Through narrative devices and interlinked stories, *Homegoing* argues that slavery is a wound carried through time, but also that healing is possible through reconnection and remembrance.

2.3 Conclusion

Both *The Underground* and *Homegoing* show that slavery is not only a historical institution but a long lasting force that continues to shape Black identity, social structures, and the struggle for survival. Whitehead and Gyasi use narrative devices such as symbolism, shifting settings, character development, and generational storytelling to reveal how deeply slavery damages individuals and communities. In *The Underground Railroad*, slavery follows Cora even beyond the plantation. Every state she enters represents a new version of racial control, proving that slavery adapts and survives in different forms. Violence, forced silence, and constant pursuit illustrates that the trauma of enslavement becomes a lifelong burden, from which freedom is desired but never secured.

In *Homegoing* trauma becomes a legacy. Through its generational narrative structure, the novel demonstrates how slavery continues through colonialism, institutional racism, and psychological scars. The separation of Effia's and Esi's families symbolises the permanent fractures slavery inflicted on African societies. Characters struggle with identity, belonging, and memory, which shows that freedom does not erase the pain of history.

Even when chains are removed, the consequences remain: families are destroyed, languages are lost, and histories are erased. The wounds of slavery extend beyond individuals to shape entire nations. Both novels argue that the past is never truly past. The trauma endured are passed from parents to children who carried it in the mind, the body, and the society.

CHAPTER THREE

QUEST FOR FREEDOM AND LITERARY DEVICES

3.0 Introduction

The quest for freedom is a strong and important theme in both Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. Slavery in these novels is not only shown as a system of forced labour, but also as a deep and painful attack on identity, family, culture, and human dignity. When people seek freedom, they are not just running away from chains they are searching for a life where they can be seen as human, live without fear, and make their own choices. Freedom is tied to hope, courage, and survival. In *The Underground Railroad*, Cora's journey from the Randall plantation through the literal underground train system becomes a symbol of resistance and endurance. Whitehead writes, "She ran because she had to. Because she had already lost everything"

(83). Her escape is not only physical but emotional and spiritual a fight to reclaim her sense of self in a world that denies her humanity. Even when she reaches temporary safety, such as at the Valentine farm, freedom remains fragile, showing that the struggle against oppression never fully ends. In *Homegoing*, freedom also takes many forms across generations. Esi's bondage on the slave ship, Ness's suffering on the plantation, and H's fight for liberation after emancipation all reveal that freedom must be constantly fought for and redefined. Gyasi writes, "They say that when you go to the white man's land, you lose everything you know" (45).

Later, Marcus, the final descendant, seeks emotional freedom by reconnecting with his African roots, standing at the same ocean that once carried his ancestors away. His journey shows that true freedom involves healing the past and reclaiming identity. Both authors use different settings and narrative techniques to show that freedom is not a single moment of escape, but a lifelong quest passed from one generation to another. Through their stories, Whitehead and Gyasi remind readers that the search for freedom is also a search for wholeness, belonging, and dignity. Both authors also make it clear that freedom is never simple. It is not something that is easily achieved. It comes with dangers, costs, sacrifices, and even loss.

Whitehead focuses on physical escape during slavery in America. He shows how enslaved people risked everything to run from plantations and fight against slave catchers. Cora's escape from the Randall plantation shows the danger and desperation of seeking freedom.

She kills a white boy while defending herself, showing the high cost of resistance. On the run, she hides in attics, rides the underground train, and faces betrayal and violence, as when Ridgeway, the slave catcher, hunts her across states. Caesar's capture and death also show how many paid with their lives for the hope of freedom.

Gyasi, on the other hand, uses a story that travels across many years. She shows how even after slavery ended, its effects continued through racism, poverty, fear, and emotional damage. Different narrative devices support this theme. Whitehead uses symbolism like the underground train system, suspenseful storytelling, and strong images of violence and escape to show how hard it was to gain freedom. Gyasi uses a family tree structure, flashbacks, simple but emotional language, and two different storylines to show how people search for freedom in both Africa and America.

Together, both novels show one main message. freedom is not just about physical escape. It is a long journey toward healing, identity, and belonging. It is a process that may continue for generations because history leaves marks that do not disappear easily. In *The Underground Railroad*, even after Cora escapes the plantation, she still feels trapped by fear and memory. Whitehead writes, "The World may be the same but am different" (290). This shows that freedom is not complete until the inner wounds of slavery begin to heal.

In *Homegoing*, Marcus, the last descendant, stands at the Atlantic shore with Marjorie and reflects on his family's long history. Gyasi writes, "He stood on the edge of the water,

feeling the old pain the new peace of knowing where he came from" (300). This moment connects personal identity with ancestral healing, showing that true freedom comes through remembrance and reconnection.

3.1 Quest for Freedom in *The Underground Railroad*

Whitehead presents the quest for freedom as a direct and dangerous struggle. The story of Cora represents many enslaved people who want more than survival. They long for dignity, identity, and control over their own lives. On the Randall plantation, Cora grows up knowing only violence and fear, where enslaved people are treated as property and punished for any act of defiance. Yet, despite the brutality surrounding her, she keeps hope alive a quiet but powerful form of resistance.

Freedom in Whitehead's novel does not come as a gift; it demands courage, sacrifice, and endurance. Cora's hesitation when Caesar invites her to run away shows how dangerous the idea of freedom can be under slavery. Whitehead writes, "Cora said no the first time Caesar approached her about running north. She said no many times before she said yes." (16). This moment captures the fear that chains the mind even before the body is freed. Still, when Cora finally chooses to escape, she begins her transformation from victim to survivor, from object to self. Her decision marks the beginning of her personal claim to humanity. Whitehead also shows that freedom is not a single event but a continuous process. The literal underground railroad a hidden train system beneath the earth becomes

a powerful symbol of that journey. Each state Cora passes through tests her in new ways. In South Carolina, she experiences temporary comfort, yet even that illusion of safety hides a system of control. The narrator notes, “Freedom was a word with different meanings for different people.” (135). This statement reminds the reader that freedom is complex it is not only the absence of chains but also the presence of choice, identity, and dignity.

The constant movement through tunnels, dark stations, and strange towns reflects the uncertain path to liberation. The darkness of the tunnels symbolises both fear and possibility the unknown future of a woman daring to escape. Whitehead writes, “The tunnel stretched on with no end in sight, the darkness complete, the air thick with the promise of somewhere else.” (80). This imagery shows that freedom is not a destination but a continuing search, filled with both danger and hope. Even when Cora reaches the Valentine farm, a place that seems like a free community, the threat of capture still follows her. Whitehead uses this to suggest that freedom in a world built on slavery remains fragile. True liberation, therefore, lies not only in physical escape but also in reclaiming one’s sense of self. Cora’s endurance and determination become symbols of collective resistance the voice of all those who refuse to remain enslaved.

Through Cora’s journey, Whitehead portrays the quest for freedom as both personal and communal. It is a movement through fear, violence, and uncertainty toward self-definition. The novel insists that the human spirit, even when buried under oppression, continues to

seek light and belonging.

Imagery

Imagery is a literary device that uses descriptive language to create vivid pictures in the reader's mind. It appeals to the senses sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell and helps readers feel the emotions, settings, and struggles of characters more deeply. Through imagery, Whitehead makes the experience of slavery and the struggle for freedom real and unforgettable.

In *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead uses striking imagery to express the pain of bondage and the courage needed to seek freedom. Life on the Randall plantation appears cruel and endless. The narrator describes, "The cotton plants bobbed and whispered in the fields, endless under the sun, as if mocking their suffering" (12). The image of endless cotton under the burning sun captures the exhaustion and hopelessness that define enslaved life. Through such vivid pictures, Whitehead allows the reader to feel the physical weight of forced labour and the emotional emptiness that slavery creates.

The imagery of violence also reveals the heavy cost of rebellion. When Big Anthony tries to escape, Whitehead shows the punishment in graphic detail: "They took him from the stocks and hanged him by his arms, whipped him until his flesh opened, and then doused him in oil and set him alight" (48). The fire, blood, and screams form a visual and sensory image of horror. This moment shows how the system of slavery uses brutality to crush the

desire for freedom. Yet, for Cora, witnessing such pain strengthens her determination to run and claim her life. When Cora finally escapes, the scenery changes completely. Whitehead's imagery of the underground tunnel captures both fear and hope: "The tunnel stretched on with no end in sight, the darkness complete, the air thick with the promise of somewhere else" (80). The darkness suggests danger and uncertainty, but the "promise of somewhere else" creates a sense of hope. The tunnel becomes a living image of the journey toward freedom hidden, risky, and unknown.

As Cora moves north, Whitehead uses bright and deceptive imagery to show how oppression hides under beauty. In South Carolina, the narrator observes, "The city was orderly and shining, its streets smooth and its buildings tall, but beneath the smiles of the white citizens lay the same old evil" (112). The clean streets and shining buildings represent false freedom a system that looks safe but continues to control Black lives. Through this contrast, Whitehead shows that true freedom requires more than changing location; it demands the breaking of deeper chains of control.

At the Valentine farm, the imagery softens to suggest hope and community. The narrator describes, "The fields spread wide and green, the laughter of children floating through the air, the sound of tools in good earth" (278). The image of wide green fields and joyful sounds creates peace and belonging. Yet this peace does not last, as violence soon returns to destroy the dream. The shift from gentle imagery to violent destruction shows how fragile freedom remains in a world still ruled by racism.

Through his use of imagery, Whitehead turns Cora's search for freedom into a vivid emotional experience. The reader sees and feels the pain, darkness, and brief moments of light that mark her journey. The cotton fields, the fire, the tunnel, and the farm together create a living picture of endurance. Whitehead's imagery shows that freedom is not only an idea but a powerful emotional reality. It grows out of struggle, fear, and faith. In *The Underground Railroad*, every image from the burning field to the whispering tunnel keeps the vision of freedom alive, proving that even in darkness, the human spirit continues to move toward the light.

Dramatic irony

Dramatic irony is a literary device in which the audience or reader knows something that the characters do not. It creates tension, sadness, or awareness of danger that the characters cannot see. Whitehead uses dramatic irony to show that what appears to be freedom is actually filled with hidden danger. Freedom looks safe on the surface but is deadly underneath. In *The Underground Railroad*, when Cora reaches North Carolina, she thinks she has escaped slavery, but the reality is worse. Black people are banned, hunted, and hanged in public. The narrator says, "The Freedom Trail extended for miles, lined with the bodies of black men and women rotting in the sun" (139). The reader already knows that Cora's freedom is fragile, while she still hopes she might find peace. This

contrast creates dramatic irony the reader feels the fear before the character fully understands it.

Even Caesar's dream of liberty carries the same tragic irony. He imagines living like a free man, saying he would "buy his own land and work it himself" (78), but readers sense from the beginning that such dreams are doomed in a racist world. His brutal death after being caught shows how freedom often becomes a trap rather than a rescue. Similarly, Big Anthony's escape attempt ends with a horrific public execution. Whitehead writes, "They burned him before the sun went down, and the smell settled over the plantation like a storm cloud" (65). The other enslaved people watch, realising that any hope of freedom could bring death instead.

Through this use of dramatic irony, Whitehead shows that the promise of freedom in America is deceptive it hides violence, fear, and betrayal beneath its surface.

Visual imagery

Visual imagery is the use of descriptive language that helps readers create mental pictures of scenes, characters, and actions in a story. It appeals to the sense of sight and makes ideas vivid and realistic. Whitehead uses visual imagery to show that slavery uses fear as a weapon. His descriptions make readers see and feel the violence and suffering of enslaved people. On the Randall plantation, for example, the narrator describes how "the cotton was blooming white, the endless fields stretching under the pitiless sun" (7). This

image contrasts beauty with cruelty the bright white fields hide the pain of those forced to work in them. The endlessness of the field suggests the long, hopeless labour that defines slavery.

Even Ridgeway, the slave catcher, plays a strong role in this imagery. His presence represents the system that works hard to stop anyone from escaping. Whitehead writes, “Ridgeway’s shadow loomed over the road, long and black, swallowing the light around Cora” (153). This image of darkness swallowing light shows how the forces of slavery threaten to destroy any sign of hope. Ridgeway’s pursuit makes readers see freedom as something constantly under attack.

Another important narrative device is the episodic structure of Cora’s journey. Each state is like a new image in her story a different scene showing both progress and danger. In South Carolina, the bright and orderly streets seem to promise safety, yet underneath lies horror. Whitehead describes “the city shone with clean avenues and brick houses, but the basements held secrets that smelled of iron and blood” (117). This visual contrast between surface beauty and hidden brutality shows that slavery adapts even in places that appear free.

The destruction of the Indiana community also offers strong visual imagery. When the Valentine farm is attacked, Whitehead writes, “Flames licked the sky, turning night into a

red storm” (295). This burning scene captures both the death of a free Black space and the persistence of racial hatred. It also reminds readers that even freedom can be fragile in a violent society. Yet, through all this, Cora continues to move forward. The final image of the open road becomes deeply symbolic and visual: “She stepped onto the road, the sun sharp on her face, and kept walking” (302). This picture of brightness and motion represents rebirth and hope.

Though her freedom is not complete, she now owns her path and her future.

Whitehead teaches through these powerful images that freedom is a lifetime fight. It is a choice to keep walking, keep living, and keep hoping no matter the danger. His vivid scenes turn the struggle for freedom into something readers can see, feel, and remember.

3.2 Quest for Freedom in *Homegoing*

Gyasi presents the quest for freedom differently. Instead of focusing only on one person, she spreads the story across many generations. This helps readers see that freedom is not achieved all at once it must be passed from one generation to the next. The novel begins with two sisters, Effia and Esi, who are separated by slavery. Effia stays in Ghana, while Esi is taken across the Atlantic. This separation symbolizes the breaking apart of African families and cultures. Gyasi writes, “It was as though the two sisters were two halves of the same soul, different sides of the world” (38). This image captures the deep wound caused by slavery the loss of connection, identity, and belonging.

Effia's descendants in Ghana live through the effects of colonization and tribal wars, while Esi's descendants in America face generations of racial oppression. Through vivid storytelling, Gyasi shows that both sides struggle for different kinds of freedom. In Ghana, freedom means reclaiming culture and land. In America, it means surviving a society built on racism. For example, H, one of Esi's descendants, says, "They say we are free, but the chains are still on our necks (152). This line shows that even after slavery ends, the fight for true equality continues.

Yaa Gyasi also uses the image of the sea to link the stories of both families. The sea becomes a symbol of both separation and connection. She writes, "The sea carried them away, but it also carried their stories back home (245). This imagery suggests that though slavery divided generations, memory and history keep them connected.

At the end of the novel, when Marjorie (Effia's descendant) and Marcus (Esi's descendant) meet and walk together by the ocean, the circle is completed. "They stood side by side, feeling the pull of the water sound of waves whispering what was lost and what was found (300). This final image represents healing the long journey toward freedom, identity, and reunion. Through these linked generations, Gyasi shows that freedom is not a single act of escape but a continuous struggle to recover history, dignity, and selfhood.

Intergenerational storytelling

Intergenerational storytelling is a narrative device where a story is told across several

generations to show how experiences, history, or trauma are passed down over time.

Yaa Gyasi uses intergenerational storytelling as a narrative device to show how slavery shapes many years of life. Many characters in America face new forms of oppression even after slavery is legally ended. Freedom becomes a changing and moving goal. For example, H lives after slavery has ended, but he is forced into a mining camp because of discriminatory laws. He is physically free, but still controlled and abused. As Gyasi writes, “They called it chain gang labor, but it was just another name for slavery” (166). Gyasi uses situational irony here to show how freedom can exist only in name while Black people remain trapped in suffering. His hard labor represents how slavery transformed but did not disappear. The author shows that even when laws change, society might still deny freedom to Black people in new ways.

In later generations, the search for freedom becomes more mental and emotional. Marcus, a modern character in the story, struggles with identity and the heavy weight of history. Even though he is not enslaved, he carries the trauma of those who came before him. He searches for answers because he wants to understand himself. As Gyasi writes, “He wanted to tell the story of blackness in America... but how could he, when he was still so lost in it?” (295). He wants freedom from confusion and inherited fear. Marcus’s journey represents psychological freedom, which is just as important as physical liberation. Gyasi uses his academic research to show that uncovering the truth about the past is a way of freeing the mind.

Meanwhile, Marjorie, who is from Effia's family line in Ghana, also feels caught between cultures. She does not fully belong in America or Ghana. For her, freedom is about belonging, identity, and self-acceptance. As Gyasi describes, "In America her blackness made her Ghanaian, in Ghana it made her American" (276). When Marcus and Marjorie meet and travel to the Cape Coast Castle, Gyasi writes, "They walked through the dungeons together, feeling the weight of what had been lost and what had survived" (300). Their meeting symbolises the closing of the family's broken circle, showing that the search for freedom continues but healing begins through connection and memory.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of objects, places, or actions to represent deeper meanings or ideas beyond their literal sense. In *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi uses symbolism to express the loss and recovery of freedom across generations.

The Cape Coast Castle stands as a symbol of stolen freedom. It is the place where African people are captured, imprisoned, and sent across the Atlantic. When the final generation returns to Ghana and visits the same castle, the act becomes deeply symbolic. It shows healing and reconnection with the past. The return to the place of captivity becomes a step toward reclaiming identity and freedom. Gyasi writes, "The family had been torn apart in

the castle, but now, after centuries, they stood above it, whole again.” (296). Gyasi also uses fire as a recurring symbol. Fire appears first when Effia’s mother’s hut burns: “The fire caught the roof, and soon the whole hut was gone.” (10). Later, fire returns in other generations as both destruction and renewal. It represents how pain and memory continue but also how each generation finds new strength to rise again. Another strong symbol is the black stone given to Effia and Esi’s descendants. The stone connects the separated branches of the family. It stands for heritage and continuity, showing that even though slavery and colonialism try to erase identity, memory and bloodline endure.

Through these symbols, Gyasi shows that the quest for freedom does not only mean physical release from bondage but also spiritual and emotional healing a freedom that comes from remembering, reconnecting, and reclaiming what history once took away.

3.3 Conclusion

Both *The Underground Railroad* and *Homegoing* shows that the quest for freedom is a long and difficult path. Whitehead shows the struggle of enslaved people who risked everything to escape and fight for their own humanity. Gyasi shows how the struggle continues after slavery through racism, inequality, and generational trauma.

Whitehead uses symbols, suspense, emotional storytelling, and vivid pictures of violence to show that freedom is risky but necessary. Cora keeps moving because she believes that life must be more than pain and fear. Her journey teaches that freedom is not a safe place;

it is a brave decision.

Gyasi shows that freedom is also about healing and understanding the past. Even when chains are broken, the effects of slavery live on in families and individuals. Marcus and Marjorie's visit to the castle shows that facing the past can be a step toward true liberation.

Together, both novels teach that freedom is more than the opposite of slavery. It includes: survival, dignity, identity, belonging, emotional and cultural healing.

Freedom takes time. It takes effort from many generations. Even when it feels far away, the desire for freedom shows the strength of the human spirit. In both stories, hope keeps moving forward. The characters show that no matter how heavy oppression is, people continue to rise, resist, and dream. Freedom might not be fully achieved in one's lifetime, but the search for it keeps humanity alive.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERARY TECHNIQUES

In *The Underground Railroad* and *Homegoing*, Colson Whitehead and Yaa Gyasi employ multiple literary techniques to represent slavery and the continual quest for freedom. These include narrative structure, symbolism, characterisation, setting, imagery, and point of view. Through these devices, both authors transform historical experiences of enslavement into emotionally powerful literary narratives that preserve memory and

emphasise resilience.

4.1 Narrative Structure

Narrative structure refers to the way a story is organized and presented to the reader.

Both authors use nonlinear storytelling to demonstrate the lasting impact of slavery. Gyasi structures *Homegoing* as a transgenerational narrative that follows two lineages from the eighteenth century to the modern period. This fragmented form emphasises how enslavement fractures family lines and identity. The novel opens with the statement, “We were two sisters separated by the Atlantic Ocean” (3), which divides the narrative into two ancestral paths and symbolises the transatlantic rupture of African heritage.

Similarly, Whitehead adopts an episodic structure in *The Underground Railroad* that mirrors Cora’s flight through different states, each presenting new versions of racial oppression. When Cora enters the dark tunnel, “The tunnel stretched on into the darkness, and she knew that freedom was somewhere beyond it” (70). The journey through darkness becomes both physical and structural, as each new station reveals another chapter in the long struggle for liberation. Gyasi also notes that “Every chapter felt like another life lived, another story remembered” (278), a line that captures the rhythm of memory and inheritance within her multi-generational structure. In both novels, fragmented narration reflects the disrupted histories caused by slavery while asserting the endurance of cultural identity.

4.2 Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of objects, characters, or events to represent deeper meanings or abstract ideas beyond their literal sense. Symbolism is a central technique in both narratives. In *The Underground Railroad*, the railroad itself becomes a literal and metaphorical symbol of the path toward freedom. Whitehead reimagines the historical network of secret routes as an actual subterranean train system, describing it as “alive, carrying those who dared to dream” (82). The image of an unseen train beneath the earth represents the hidden resistance and shared hope that sustained enslaved people.

In *Homegoing*, Gyasi’s use of symbolic objects and images conveys the pain and persistence of memory. The black stone given to Effia “carried the weight of the entire family” (42), serving as a physical connection between generations even when names and histories are lost. Likewise, the recurring image of fire “Fire consumed everything, the huts, the memories, even the names” (61) represents both destruction and renewal. Through these symbols, Gyasi and Whitehead show how freedom and identity survive even amid loss and displacement.

4.3 Characterisation

Characterisation is the method an author uses to create and develop characters in a story. It involves describing their actions, thoughts, speech, and interactions to reveal their personalities, motivations, and growth.

Whitehead and Gyasi create deeply human characters whose lives embody both oppression and resistance. In *The Underground Railroad*, Cora's growth from a fearful girl into a determined survivor captures the psychological journey from bondage to self-liberation. Whitehead writes, "Cora refused to let the darkness claim her spirit" (119), showing how courage becomes a form of rebellion.

In *Homegoing*, Gyasi presents a wide range of characters across time whose stories reflect the generational transmission of trauma and endurance. Esi, one of the earliest figures, "cried not only for her own chains but for the chains her children would inherit" (28), acknowledging that slavery's wounds stretch beyond individual suffering. By the novel's conclusion, Gyasi observes that "Each descendant carried a piece of the others a voice, a scar, a dream" (300). Through such characters, both authors portray freedom as an evolving process of self-discovery and collective remembrance rather than a single act of escape.

4.4 Setting

Setting is the time, place, and social environment in which a story takes place. It includes the physical location, historical period, and cultural background that shape the characters' lives and actions. Setting functions as more than a backdrop; it becomes a symbolic reflection of power and survival. Whitehead reimagines the geography of America to expose the multiple faces of racial oppression. In South Carolina, for instance, "they

spoke of progress, but freedom came with chains invisible to the eye” (135). The setting reveals the illusion of equality within systems designed to control Black lives. As Cora moves northward, from Georgia’s brutal plantation to Indiana’s deceptive refuge, each landscape becomes part of a moral map of America.

Gyasi situates her narrative within both African and American contexts, illustrating slavery’s dual impact on the continents. “The Castle stood at the edge of the sea, where freedom was stolen and sold” (10), she writes, turning Cape Coast Castle into a symbol of betrayal and loss. The transatlantic journey links these settings, reminding readers that the legacy of slavery crosses oceans. Whitehead echoes this continuity when he writes, “From Alabama’s cotton fields to Indiana’s forests, each landscape told the same story of flight and pursuit” (178). Through setting, both authors present slavery as a global condition and freedom as a continuous, borderless pursuit.

4.5 Imagery and Language

Imagery and Language refer to the use of descriptive and expressive words that appeal to the senses and create vivid mental pictures for the reader. Imagery helps readers see, hear, feel, taste, or smell what is happening, while language refers to the author’s choice of words, tone, and style. Both authors use vivid imagery and poetic language to bring the experiences of enslavement to life. Whitehead’s descriptions force readers to confront the

physical and emotional reality of slavery. He writes, “Blood soaked into the earth until the soil itself seemed to weep” (94), a striking image that transforms violence into a living memory. Yet within his brutal imagery, there are also moments of hope. When Cora escapes, “She felt the wind slice across her face it was the sound of running, the sound of life” (201), suggesting that survival itself is an act of defiance.

Gyasi’s language combines lyricism and pain. The line, “The ocean roared like a mourning mother, carrying away her stolen children” (16), personifies the sea as both witness and mourner of African loss. Her imagery captures the depth of emotion tied to displacement, while her lyrical tone preserves beauty amid suffering. Together, both authors use imagery and language not just to describe pain but to transform it into memory and resistance.

4.6 Point of View and Tone

Point of view is the perspective from which a story is told. It determines who narrates the events and how much the reader knows about the thoughts and feelings of the characters.

Tone is the writer’s attitude toward the subject or audience, shown through word choice and style. Both novels employ shifting perspectives and tonal contrasts to deepen their

emotional power. In *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead uses a third-person limited point of view that closely follows Cora, allowing readers to feel her fear and endurance. “Cora never knew who watched her, the living or the dead” (210) reveals her constant tension between danger and survival. The tone shifts between despair and resilience, capturing the fragile balance between hope and fear in her journey.

Gyasi, on the other hand, alternates between multiple narrators, each representing a different generation. “Every chapter was a new tongue, a new prayer whispered against forgetting” (188). The shifting voices mirror the fragmentation caused by slavery and create a communal narrative voice that resists silence. By the end, Gyasi writes, “Even in the silence between generations, the story kept speaking” (302), showing that memory itself becomes a character, and the collective tone of remembrance gives continuity to the broken history.

Conclusion

Through these literary techniques, Colson Whitehead and Yaa Gyasi transform history into art that preserves memory, challenges erasure, and celebrates endurance. Their narrative structures, symbolism, characterisation, settings, imagery, and points of view work together to reveal that the quest for freedom is both physical and psychological, personal and collective. By blending creativity with historical truth, both writers ensure

that the memory of enslavement remains alive, speaking powerfully to contemporary struggles for identity, justice, and belonging.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study examines the representations of freedom in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, revealing that the quest for liberation is complex, multifaceted, and deeply tied to history, memory, and identity. In both novels, freedom extends beyond the mere absence of physical chains to encompass

the reclamation of selfhood, dignity, and cultural belonging. Whitehead portrays freedom as a perilous and uncertain journey, highlighting how systemic oppression continues to limit autonomy even after escape. Through Cora's experiences, the narrative demonstrates that survival requires resilience, courage, and vigilance, while also exposing the lingering threats of violence and injustice that persist in a society shaped by racial inequality.

In parallel, Gyasi's multi-generational narrative shows that freedom is an evolving process spanning time and geography. By tracing the lives of Effia and Esi and their descendants, the novel illustrates how the legacy of slavery and colonialism shapes the experiences of successive generations. Freedom in *Homegoing* is expressed not only through physical emancipation but also through the preservation of cultural identity, emotional resilience, and the reclamation of historical memory. The intergenerational perspective underscores that the struggle for liberation is continuous, requiring both remembrance of the past and active efforts toward self-determination.

Both authors employ literary techniques that strengthen these explorations. Symbolism, characterization, imagery, and setting create an immersive reading experience that communicates the physical and psychological impacts of slavery. Narrative structures in both novels highlight the complexity of the freedom struggle, showing that it is rarely linear and often accompanied by setbacks, loss, and moments of hope. Through these techniques, readers witness the resilience, resistance, and agency of characters striving for autonomy in oppressive systems.

Overall, this study demonstrates that freedom, as depicted in these novels, is both a personal and collective endeavour. Whitehead and Gyasi emphasise that liberation requires courage, perseverance, and engagement with historical realities. Their works reveal that the quest for freedom is ongoing, layered, and essential to understanding human experience. By portraying the multifaceted challenges and triumphs of those who fight for autonomy, both novels offer enduring lessons about the meaning of freedom, the costs of oppression, and the resilience of the human spirit.

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