

## Winning hand



ECSU students (from left) Michael Bowden, Andre Williams, Bruce Boyd, Trone Gibbs and Maceo Williams enjoy a game of cards while waiting for their class to start in Johnson Hall. From the looks of things, Gibbs is holding the winning hand.

### BOOK REVIEW

# Morrison spins a turbulent love story in *Jazz*

By Sarah Beth Workman

"Jazz" by Toni Morrison. Published by Alfred Knopf, New York, 1992. 229 Pages

Toni Morrison's novel *Jazz* is a love story dealing with complex human emotions in the black urban life of the 1920s. *Jazz* tells the complex and violent story of Joe and Violet Trace, who are husband and wife, and Dorcas, Joe's lover.

Violet first meets Joe one night while sleeping under a tree, after working hard all day in the cotton fields. Sulking because she has been slower than the other women at picking cotton, she is trying to decide whether she should go back to her home town, when a man falls out of the tree above her head and lands beside her.

This launches the beginning of a long, turbulent relationship. Violet chose Joe because she felt that if he fell out of the sky, he was hers. They court for a while, get married, and decide to move to the city.

They both believe the city is magical, and that they will have a good life there. Joe becomes a door-to-door salesman for Cleopatra beauty products. Violet becomes a hairdresser but never gets her license. She goes to people's houses or they come to hers when they want their hair done.

Joe and Violet Trace never have children, and they slowly become stuck in the ruts of everyday life. By the time Joe reaches his fifties, he feels he needs some excitement in his life, so he picks 18 year old Dorcas to be his lover. During this time Violet daydreams a lot and has a few mental problems. She is content to talk to her birds and escape into her reveries.

After several months of being his lover, Dorcas is shot by Joe Trace. Violet then finds out about her husband having a lover, and in a fit of jealousy and rage, attacks Dorcas' corpse with a knife at the funeral.

Violet then becomes obsessed with the

dead girl, and tries to find out all about her from her aunt, Mrs. Alice Manfred. Joe becomes withdrawn and does nothing but cry and look out the window. They then meet Dorcas' friend, Felice, and befriend her. The narrator sees this as a way for them to deal with their feelings about Dorcas.

Toni Morrison moves this story in and out of the present, past, and future, switching voices and, at times, tenses. Through flashbacks and foreshadowing, Morrison is able to tell this love story allowing the reader to feel involved in the interactions of the characters.

Joe Trace is a believable character and what happens to him could happen in today's world. It is often an everyday occurrence to hear how someone shot their lover because they wanted to end the relationship.

Toni Morrison is good at description. She writes, "Daylight slants like a razor cutting the buildings in half. In the top

half I see looking faces and it's not easy to tell which are people, and which are the work of stonemasons. Below are shadows where any blase' thing takes place: clarinets and lovemaking, fists and the voices of sorrowful women." Her descriptions often have a dreamlike, hallucinogenic quality. The mention of "sorrowful women" is often one of Toni Morrison's themes; she writes about the hardships women have in life. This can be seen in the character of Violet Trace.

Although this book is quick reading and the characters are engaging, Morrison's use of an anonymous narrator to tell much of the story is confusing. Due to her reliance on this technique, it is often hard to understand where the story is going and who is telling the story. Her narration of the story gets in the way of the story. Therefore, *Jazz* might not be the best book to introduce a new reader to Morrison, author of the widely acclaimed, *Song of Solomon*, and *Beloved*.