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Feminismus ve vybraných románech Toni Morrison a Alice Walker

Feminism in Selected Novels by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker

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1. Introduction

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are two Pulitzer Prize-winning authors who have gained worldwide respect for their contribution to literature that is focused on black heroines whose living conditions and daily struggles are determined by their gender, race and the patriarchal post-slave society. Moreover, Toni Morrison's long list of awards is dominated by the Nobel Prize for Literature received in 1993. Both of the authors are also known as tireless social activists. Although retired, their insights into the problems of society are still very much appreciated and their actions in support of disadvantaged groups of people are still highly respected and, on top of that, closely watched by the media. However, the depth of their public engagement is one of the many factors dividing their approach to the problems of the current world. While Toni Morrison has been interested in the struggles of the black community, has focused on political aspects of African-American lives and has helped gifted young people to develop their literary talent through her established society[1], Alice Walker has been active all around the globe with no religious or racial restraints. As she publicly declares in her blog, she keeps fighting for the rights of the oppressed people.[2] Lately, she was shocked when she realized the living (or non-living) conditions of the people in Gaza. She feels a part of "the world community that cares about peace and justice." [3] Indeed, her activism is not narrowed down to the black community as in the case of Morrison. Despite these differences in their social engagement, black women are the intersectional sphere of their literary work. Both Morrison and Walker place black heroines at the centers of their novels. This thesis, however, will attempt to explore themes related to feminism and womanism as seen from the perception of a black woman who is ultimately disadvantaged by a patriarchal society because of her gender.

It is necessary, in order to understand the depths of Morrison's and Walker's thoughts, to realize the essential elements shaping their literary language. The background influencing their viewpoint is well summarized by Drucilla Cornell, who reveals the underlying motivation predetermining their works: "For an African American woman there is the brutal legacy of slavery, which is inseparable from how she imaginatively recollects herself as an African

[1]The Official Website of The Toni Morrison Society, 20. Jun. 2010 <http://www.tonimorrisonsociety.org/>.
[2]Alice Walker's Garden, *Alice Walker in Gaza*, 20. Jun.2010 < http://www.alicewalkersgarden.com/media.html>.
[3]Alice Walker's Garden, *Alice Walker in Gaza*, 20. Jun.2010 < http://www.alicewalkersgarden.com/media.html>.

American woman, that no white woman can know."[4] Nevertheless, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker approach their slave heritage in a different manner. While Morrison constantly looks back and devotes her writing to re-representation of African-American history, Alice Walker rather looks forward into the future and, by her didactic approach, outlines the strategies that should instigate personal growth of women.

The specific works analyzed in this thesis will be *Sula* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. I have chosen these novels for their significance in the African-American literary canon, and for qualities that were assessed over time. While the choice of the novels *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* is justified by The Pulitzer Prize, *Sula* - which is, among other things, a novel depicting the moral and physical decline of the main heroine - was selected to contrast with Walker's *bildungsroman*. However, the central theme of these novels that will be explored is a black woman and her questionable representation in literature. In their novels, Morrison and Walker find diverse solutions to the problematic nature of the place of black women in a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the selected fiction will be explored separately in terms of the feminist/womanist aspects of Morrison's and Walker's works.

Toni Morrison's novels will form the largest portion of the analysis. The first chapter will interpret the novel *Sula* (1974) and trace Morrison's ways of challenging the stereotypical depictions of a black woman. The objective of this analysis will be to reveal significant themes such as community, motherhood (the role attributed to a woman by the traditions of society), the true identity of a black woman and her crooked representation as recorded in slave narratives. In fact, the novel supplements the gaps in slave narratives that omit psychological analysis of the slaves' minds, and it points to the issue of self-love. Morrison's narrative strategy is based on two female heroines, Sula and Nel, who, in their answering of the demands of the gender structured society, choose antithetical postures. While Nel represents conventional womanhood deriving her identity from the role of wife and, mainly, mother; Sula's personality, obsessed with her internal and external blackness, as Morrison believes, does not reflect any female character depicted in the whole history of literature. Therefore, Morrison calls her a "new world black woman."[5] However, the new type of a maverick heroine, masculine in her essence and depreciating all

[4] Drucilla Cornell, *At the Heart of Freedom : Feminism, Sex, & Equality* (Ewing: Princeton University Press, 1998) 10.
[5] Maggie Galehouse, *"New World Woman": Toni Morrison's Sula*, Findarticles. Fall 1999. 23. May 2007.

traditional values, is trapped in isolation from all, the community, the family, and her friend Nel. In fact, her independence as gained is poisoned by her extreme solitariness. Except for showing that the ultimate denial of the gender structure of society, as well as conventionalizing into the traditional role of a mother, does not lead to happiness, Morrison does not propose any specific solution. The open ending of the novel, characteristic of her work, is explained by Morrison's words: "I don't want to give readers something to swallow. I want to give them something to feel and think about, and I hope that I sat it in such a way that it is a legitimate thing, and a valuable thing."[6] Nevertheless, this analysis aiming at the gender perceptions will be based on a close reading of the novel *Sula* and additional academic criticism by, for example, Elliot Buttler-Evans, Justine Tally and Harris Trudier.

The second chapter will concentrate on Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved* (1988), with a consideration of critical works by Nancy Peterson, Jennifer Lee, Barbara Christian and others. In spite of the fact that *Beloved* traces contemporary issues such as freedom and woman's place, Morrison goes back in time and tries to deal with history by recovering the inconsistencies conveyed by slave narratives. She successfully questions the credibility of slave narratives as a part of literacy used by the dominant white culture to maintain its hegemony. The objective of *Beloved* is to disestablish stereotypical perceptions of the black woman and to integrate omitted themes, such as psychological analysis of slaves, into the picture of the slave past. The core of the examination is a re-representation of a black heroine who is neither virtuous nor powerless, and who challenges the black mamma stereotype. Again, the main themes of the analysis will be gender and race in connection to a black woman, her limitations assigned by the white patriarchal hegemony and the impacts of slavery problematizing the identities of former slaves and their offspring.

The third chapter will turn its attention to a scrutiny of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1983), and to the concept of womanism as a racial branch of feminism enriched by spiritual notions and cultural heritage. The disadvantages of black women should be perceived in connection to the themes of racism, sexism and classism on a background of the womanist teaching defined as embracing notions of self-growth, self-love and unity with other black women. This chapter will explain why womanism redefines the idea of God, and how it is linked to the process of emancipation. The primary focus is given to the destiny of the main heroine that

[6] Toni Morrison, Nellie McKey, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter, 1983) 421.

is designed with the aim of highlighting the benefits derived from the gender and sexual liberation caused by a womanist approach to life's struggles. A close reading of the novel will be supported by the insight of, amongst others, the critics Gladys J. Willis, Anthony Reddie and Barbara Christian.

The Conclusion will focus on a comparison of the selected works by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Thus, attention will be paid to the significant themes displayed in the novels such as racism and the limitations of gender roles. The objective of this analysis will be to find some common themes displayed in the authors' fiction that connect their understanding of the world, such as issues of freedom, woman's place, stereotypes surviving in literacy and a significance of the black community and its spirituality which makes the culture unique and Black.

2. New World Black Woman in *Sula*

One of the central themes of Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* is a black woman who is liberated from traditional stereotypical descriptions of female figures, re-represented, and, metaphorically, implanted as a nightshade into a racially unified neighborhood. All these strategies emphasize her divergence from conventions, which, unambiguously, exhibits her as a new type of heroine. Therefore, Morrison's narration distances itself from both slave narratives that ignored self-identities of black women (written for example by Maria Child and Harriet E. Wilson), and representations of artificially virtuous black females, popular in 19th century. Morrison's heroine Sula bears signs of a maverick, who is proud of herself no matter how she is viewed by the community. Moreover, her endless self-love is in contrast with the broken identities of the slaves. The novel is scrutinized with an objective to trace feminist approaches concerning the main heroine Sula and her doubles. This chapter, in fact, discusses Morrison's writing strategies in challenging the stereotypes that shaped her novel *Sula*, such as representation of the community, questioning the concept of a black mamma as the only right role for an African-American woman, emancipation that is implemented by the masculinization of a female character and, inevitably, demasculinization of male heroes.

A prerequisite for a re-representation of a black female identity is a re-construction of a black community that, consequently, facilitates a basis where a new type of a heroine emerges. According to Elliott Buttler-Evans, the socio-political theme of community is supplemented by exquisite language which she finds, surprisingly, prevailing: "Central to the Morrison narrative is the construction of an ethnic community reinforced by a consciousness of the aesthetic as a textual dominant."[1] However, the emphasis on community setting is obvious from the introductory sentence which contains images of re-wrenched roots: "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make the room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood."[2] In a similar way, the roots of the black ancestors had been once removed from their ancestral land in Africa, and relocated to a new land. In the case of the novel, this hilly land is called the Bottom. The ironic name may suggest that the

[1] ed. Elliott Buttler-Evans, *Race, Gender, Desire* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 62.
[2] Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Vintage International, 2004) 3.

real origins of African-Americans are supplanted by a newly developed culture that struggled to achieve its reestablishment. Further, the inhospitable hilly land also implies an additional struggle which, in a certain sense, may mirror the reader's trouble to accept Sula's resistant character. In view of those complex meanings, the political setting of the novel must be understood as the most significant. Buttler-Evans therefore failed to recognize the political aspect of Morrison's work that has to be taken into account.

As usual in Morrison's novels, the very first sentence of the introduction is a multileveled construction entangled with varieties of implications.[3] One of them points to a relationship between Sula and Nel. Morrison explains the reasons for using a symbol of a berry for her central female character in her speech claiming that she "always thought of Sula as quintessentially black, metaphysically black. […] She is New World black and New World woman."[4] Sula is compared to a "double dose of *chosen* blackness and biological blackness."[5] Morrison uses the word *chosen* that is a prominent feature of Sula's complex personality and characterizes her attitude towards life. Additionally, the theme of choice is a strong presumption of a further level of the novel, which, in effect, opens space for feminist perceptions.

Certainly, Morrison, unlike Alice Walker, does not consider herself a feminist; to the contrary, she believes that "the conflict of genders is a cultural illness."[6] In spite of her manifestation, her views are, unconsciously, formed by her experience that is, in fact has to be, determined by her gender. Her opinions of the world shaping her choice of vocabulary are made through her feminine eyes. Even Morrison is aware of the feminine aspect of her writing when she, in her critical work *Playing in the Dark,* claims: "My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderlized, sexualized, wholly racialized world."[7] Since the feminist movement has separated into many branches adjusted to specific demands of individual groups, there is no concise definition of what it means to be a feminist. Instead, there is a scale of approaches with some points of contact based on gender perceptions. Some of the junctions, such as an inevitable right to make one's own choices as voiced by Sula, are traceable in Morrison's works. This opinion is fully supported by Janet Holland, whose research on

[3] Toni Morrison, *"Unspeakable Things Unspoken." Toni Morrison's Lecture 2000*. 23. May 2007. 146.
[4] Maggie Galehouse, *"New World Woman": Toni Morrison's Sula*, Findarticles. Fall 1999. 23. May 2007 <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3708/is_199910/ai_n8871625>.
[5] Morrison, *"Unspeakable Things Unspoken."* 153, <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/morrison90.pdf>.
[6] Morrison, McKey 421.
[7] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Vintage International, 1992) 4.

feminist methodologies came to the conclusion that: "Most versions of feminism assume that people have some power to make choices and act on them (unless forcibly rendered totally helpless) and so can be held morally responsible for their actions."[8]

Sula, without restraint, chooses to stay outside the society because of her unwillingness to behave according to the social conventions of the strictly patriarchal black community. As Agnes Suranyi points out, following this narrative strategy, Morrison designedly "challenges the tradition of creating positive black characters, always consistent with themselves."[9] Sula is the opposite as her deeds are unpredictable; her attitude is incompatible with the expectations of the society. Sula's boldness in finding her own way of life, her urge to make individual choices in spite of being condemned by her fellows is a quality attributed to a feminist approach to life.

Further, Sula, as an independent and self supporting heroine, does not even long for any sympathy. She is content with the state of affairs as they are, because her destiny, her ultimate loneliness, is a result of her choices. The scene preceding her death fully supports this reading of the novel:"You laying there in that bed without a dime or a friend to your name having done all the dirt you did in this town and you still expect folks to love you?"[10] Sula's immediate response necessarily strikes the readers with its calmness: "Oh they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me."[11] However, her prophesy comes true only partially, not the whole community, but only Nel will recognize how much she needs her friend.

Indeed, Sula learned early, during her childhood, that she, because of her unchained and unpredictable nature, is not truly cared for by her own mother. Coincidentally, she overheard Hannah's conversation with her friends: "…like I love Sula. I just don't like her." This scene reflects feminist opinions perceiving mothers as potentially harmful to their children. Nancy J. Chodorow, a feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst, sums up the views raised in the 1970s as follows: "the central argument [was] that mothers are noxious to daughters, and that the daughter's subsequent unhappiness stems from this initial relationship."[12] Because Sula as a child

[8] Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland, *Feminist Methodology : Challenges and Choices (*London: Sage Publications Incorporated, 2002) 10.
[9] ed. Justine Tally, *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 20.
[10] Morrison, *Sula* 145.
[11] Morrison, *Sula* 145.
[12] Nancy J. Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 80.

underwent this deeply devastating emotional harm caused by her mother, she never anticipated that anybody might like her. She simply did not care.

Shadrack, another outcast and Sula's double, highlights her solitude. Neither of them ever questioned why they are regarded as outcasts. Both of them established their identities independently from the neighborhood, but the community, in response to their ungovernable individualism, attributed additional stigmatizing qualities to them. In the case of Sula, the judgment of the community was in conformity with the roles traditionally ascribed to insubordinate women in the folk tradition; which is to say, she was regarded as a witch. Sula's witchlike nature is implicated in her metaphorical name. In Morrison's own words, "nightshade was thought to counteract witchcraft"[13]. The witchcraft connects the symbol of a nightshade with the symbol of a robin attributed to Sula by the society for her untamed nature.

Except for being marked as outcasts from the society, the figures of Sula and Shadrack have one more characteristics in common. Qualities traditionally attributed to a specific gender are transposed between them. As a result, Shadrack is demasculinized, while Sula gains some masculine features. Traditionally, women have longed for safety implied from sameness, while men have been hunters whose "nature" has forced them to reject any stability. Sula's and Shadrack's natures are different, because they fear the opposite, but their anxieties reflect their redefined gender qualities. Sameness is the biggest threat for Sula; it is what she calls on her deathbed "a slow dying". On the other hand, sameness means safety for Shadrack. Therefore, Sula runs away after Shadrack scares her by his word *always*: "So he said 'always' so she would not have to be afraid of the change…"[14] Nevertheless, Shadrack's word *always* almost becomes a prophecy of Sula's death. The lines that describe her passing are presented in a notion of continuity. She is dead, but the narrator's voice describes her peaceful dying by these words: "Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was not breathing, because she didn't have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead."[15] The fictional scene overlaps overcomes the dimensions of our earthly existence. Therefore, it may be

[13] "*Unspeakable Things Unspoken*" 153.
[14] Morrison, *Sula* 157.
[15] Morrison, *Sula* 149.

approached as a linkage to the African folk tradition that, according to Trudier Harris, adheres to the belief that "the demise of body is not the end of being."[16]

As Agnes Suranyi notices, except for Shadrack, there is one more mirror that reflects certain aspects of Sula's identity. In Suranyi's words, "Sula has not one, but two doubles, Shadrack and Nel."[17] Whereas Shadrack functions as an intensifier of Sula's severance pointing towards her unsteady nature and ascribed masculine qualities; the comparison of the two 'berries' grown from the same neighborhood opens a dimension for a social criticism and a feminist reading. Sula's and Nel's natures are distinct in many respects. While Sula is scared by tedious sameness, believing that "the real hell of Hell is that it is forever;"[18] sameness symbolizes safety for Nel, who embodies the traditional role of a mother. However, even Nel is slightly distinct from a conventional black mamma stereotype which is defined by Christian: "Mammy is black in color, fat, nurturing, religious, kind, above all strong and […] enduring. […] She must be plump and have big breasts and arm."[19] Nel seems to be devoid of purely ethnical signs of motherhood, which makes her a more universal maternal figure.

When analyzing the two female characters placed in a patriarchal society with limited choices for females, the readers have to focus on what is absent just as on everything that is present. From this point of view, the qualities that divide Sula and Nel are the same ones that connect them. Particularly, these "connective dividers" are present in the aforementioned symbols of a nightshade and a blackberry.

Obviously, blackberry stands for Nel because of her motherly nature and her conventional way of life. As Morrison says in her speech: "blackberry patch seemed equally appropriate for Nel: nourishing, never needing to be tended or cultivated, once rooted and bearing."[20] The differences in the natures of these two kinds of berries support the previous argument of "connective dividers." The theme of choosing a place in the society was explained in relation to Sula's real self, but there is another point of view from which the subject of choice could be traced; that is feminism.

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[16] Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993) 154.
[17] ed. Justine Tally 18.
[18] Morrison, *Sula* 107.
[19] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 2000) 2.
[20] "*Unspeakable Things Unspoken*" 153.

Reading *Sula* as a feminist text, or rather a text that presents a feminist perspective on the world, we need to understand the setting of the novel as primary patriarchal. However, the patriarchal settlement of the community is enfeebled by a high number of demasculinized male characters. Therefore, the readers might be puzzled when analyzing the Peace family, which is central to the story. For that reason, Morrison clarifies the superiority of the male (and white) population when she retrospectively describes how the two *berries* became friends: "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be."[21]

Primarily, the quoted passage is designed to underline the truth that the choices for females are limited by the patriarchal imbalanced system to two basic possibilities. A woman can either become a wife and a mother, or an outcast. From this point of view Nel acts in contrast to Sula. As a child, Nel "rose grandly to the occasion of motherhood."[22] It was her mother Helene who shaped her character until Nel "became obedient and polite. The mother calmed any enthusiasms that little Nel showed until she drove her daughter's imagination underground."[23] All these aspects of Nel's upbringing are in agreement with Chodorow's theory that the role of a mother is not inborn but acquired. It is the society that forces females to adapt to the requirements of the culture that above all values women's ability for reproduction. Sydie sums up Chodorow's theory by these words: "The fact that women mother produces certain asymmetrical personality characteristics in males and females. Specifically, women's mothering produces mothers, that is, women who want to mother."[24] The definition mirrors Helen's educational strategy purposely instilling morals into her daughter. In her understanding, the moral code included principles of the patriarchal stratifications of gender roles. In other words, Helen made sure that Nel lets the society conventionalize herself to a housewife and, after the fashion of her mother, her daughter becomes a mother as well. Again, Helen's goals in raising her daughter correspond with Sydie's understanding of Chodorow's views: "the fact that women 'mother' has to do with social convenience rather than biological necessity."[25]

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[21] Morrison, *Sula* 52.
[22] Morrison, *Sula* 18.
[23] Morrison, *Sula* 18.
[24] R. A. Sydie, *Natural Women, Cultured Men: A Feminist Perspective on Sociological Theory* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994) 163.
[25] R. A. Sydie 162.

On the other hand, Nel's rejection of independence is based on race and even on her gender perception, which is emphasized by her powerlessness. Nel speaks to Sula on her deathbed like this: "You can't do it all. You a woman and colored woman at that. You can't act like man. You can't be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't."[26] Actually, Nel was wrong; Sula could do all that and she knew it. Therefore, she did not hesitate to scream back at her:"…I just do everything."[27] Truly, she was doing whatever she liked; but, as a consequence of her incapability to subdue herself to gender designed conventions, she lived her life in a chosen loneliness, which is, despite her free choice, loneliness and, thereupon, she died as an outcast. As Morrison declares, Sula's harsh end follows the pattern of many self-confident heroines: "In much literature a woman's escape from male rule led to regret, misery, if not complete disaster." [28]

As stated, the notion of a "connective divider" is also present in Sula's rejection of the traditional role of a mother. Her attitude is explained by her simple argument in her reaction to Eva's reproach that she should have some babies: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself."[29] Sula's claim for personal growth partially echoes Walker's concept of womanism for its pledge to self-determination. On the other hand, her selfishness, or solitariness lacking unity and solidarity with other woman are aspects contradicting womanism, as we shall see in the last chapter.

Nevertheless, the 'baby talk' is a false argument for Sula for two reasons. First, Eva does not speak for herself, but she interprets the general opinion of the society. At this point of her life, Sula does not have any intention to act according to the rules of the patriarchate. Therefore, she does not want to have children with any man who may, as it was usual in the community, leave her and her children. She rather chooses to be lonely, because her "lonely is [hers]."[30] She is not "secondhanded lonely"[31], abandoned by others, as Nel or Eva who has been also left by her husband incapable to fulfill the role of a bread winner and a family supporter. Eva's explanation why she lives alone with her children was simple "Not my choice."[32] That is exactly what Sula

[26] Morrison, *Sula* 142.
[27] Morrison, *Sula 143.*
[28] Morrison, *Sula xvi.*
[29] Morrison, *Sula* 92.
[30] Morrison, *Sula* 143.
[31] Morrison, *Sula* 143.
[32] Morrison, *Sula* 92.

did not want to face. Choices that would be made by others were unbearable for her autonomous mind.

The second reason for Sula's rejecting motherhood can be detected only from a feminist standpoint. For many feminists, if we simplify the matter, marriage is a business deal where a man is viewed as a boss, a woman is an employee and children are some kind of a product of that deal. Sula does not want to be "a producer". In other words, she is not *a blackberry* to breed fruits. As her metaphoric name suggests, her substance is disengaged from maternal notions, strengthened and poisonous. In fact, Sula's character takes on a masculine role. That is another reason why she rejects Eva's demand to have some babies and why she disagrees with Nel on the subject of motherhood. Sula knows she "would act like what [Nel] call[s] a man."[33] She would leave her children as "every man [she] ever knew."[34]

Even Sula's promiscuous life can be understood as taking on the dominant, masculine behavior, but it is more than that. For Sula, it is freedom, both economical and sexual. This freedom is portrayed as inheritable from mother to daughter; it starts with Eva, passes to Hannah and ends with Sula. An evidence of it is explicitly stated in the novel: "…those Peace women loved all men. It was manlove that Eva bequeathed to her daughters…The Peace women simply loved maleness, for its own sake."[35]

Additionally, the thirst for independence, if we understand an abundance of short-term relationships as an expression of freedom, seems to be sturdier with every successive generation in the Peace lineage. Even though Eva liked her frequent male visitors, she could still keep her female friends who did not think ill of her. Moreover, she became an advisor to newlywed couples living in her house. Paradoxically, the male part of these couples facilitated Hannah's pipeline of fresh lovers. As Morrison harshly notes, and, above all, stigmatizes Hannah in the eyes of the readers, Hannah "would fuck practically anything."[36] The family's obsession with sex reaches a socially unbearable peak in the *philandering* nature of Sula. Considering the attitudes of her mother and grandmother, she could not find any distinct way of maverick's self-expression.

[33] Morrison, *Sula* 143.
[34] Morrison, *Sula* 143.
[35] Morrison, *Sula* 41.
[36] Morrison, *Sula* 43.

As the novel presents the main heroine, Sula "went to bed with men as frequently as she could."[37] This inherited attitude "came to Hannah's daughter naturally."[38] But there was a sharp distinction between their manners. "Hannah had been a nuisance, but she was complimenting the woman, in a way, by wanting their husbands. Sula was trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow."[39] Moreover, Sula did not feel *gratitude* towards her lovers; she was only interested in herself. It was her way to "find herself […] and join herself in matchless harmony."[40]

The last "connective divider" is the search for an answer to the question who is "good" and who is "evil". This is the most complex theme of the whole novel, which has to be approached by each individual reader. As Robert Graunt argues in his article: "Morrison's ambiguities have to be filled […] by the reader." As the Bottom is placed on the hills, we cannot get to the real "bottom of things". The community would give a simple answer to this question. In their perception, the good one is Nel. The evil one is Sula, who is many times demonized by the neighborhood. The lines describing Sula's selfishness and egocentrism seem to be supportive of her evilness:

> Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her.[41]

In Nel's understanding, to be "good" means to fulfill the expectations of the patriarchal society, to produce offspring and to devote one's whole self to them. Morrison questions the generally established values that are taken for granted without considerations of their origins and intentions of their creators. She does not fully reject them, but points to the fact that they were established by the general consensus of the society – patriarchal in its substance. Thus, what is perceived as "good" by the dominant part of the society, by men, does not have to be "good" for the powerless, females. Further, being mothers, or breeders, if we use the term inherited from slave

[37] Morrison, *Sula* 122.
[38] Morrison, *Sula* 125.
[39] Morrison, *Sula* 115.
[40] Morrison, *Sula* 123.
[41] Morrison, *Sula* 118.

narratives, was an identity of enslaved African-American women not constructed for its moral qualities, but for the benefits of a slave owner who could easily extend his property.

Nevertheless, there is still the broad sphere of ambiguities that wait for an individual interpretation of each reader. In fact, there is not a straightforward answer. Sula is not a typical heroine, but a rebel who acts with the awareness of its consequences, and, at times, because of these after-effects. Sula simply wants to go against the wall of socially organized conventions. It is very hard to accept her deeds; therefore, it is almost unthinkable to prefer her to Nel who lost her husband only because of Sula's lust.

The scene where Nel finds her husband and Sula naked in the bedroom has a tremendous impact on their lives. The devastating consequences could not be foreseen by the participants. This passage of the novel is significant even for its formal aspects. In the adultery scene, suddenly, the third person narrator switches to the first person narration and the readers are presented with Nel's self-perception. She becomes the scale against which everything is measured. Her devastation from the double betrayal of her best friend Sula and, on top of that, her husband would not be so impressive and intense if presented by the distanced and anonymous third person narrator. As a result of cheating on his wife, Jude instantly leaves Nel and their children. The last sentence of this scene comments on the fact that Nel's husband simply packed his belongings and left without his *tie*. The word *tie* is a nice example of Morrison's skilled usage of word play. In the case of the word 'tie', the hint is obvious, but effective. Clearly, the emphasis is on the bonds connecting Nel to her husband and her friend, a marriage bond and firmness that are torn by the betrayal.

The community accepted Jude's unfaithfulness and his abrupt resignation on the role of a father, because he was a man and it was not unusual for a man to leave his family. Some even considered it to be a part of male nature. Forbearance towards Jude's deed stands in a sharp contrast to the condemnation of Sula. In spite of the fact that Sula and Jude were guilty in the same way, the community rejects only Sula. A sole explanation is, paradoxically, given by Nel in her quarrel with Sula when she criticized Sula for her independent behavior, loose living and tendency to leave everything and everyone that she does not need any more. Her words reveal the truth of unequal social standing of men and women.

Jude's reasons for entering into marriage could be viewed as an additional evidence of unequal social standing of women. Jude needed a wife, because: "Without that someone he was a waiter hanging around a kitchen like a woman. With her he was the head of a household."[42] The statement "he needed that someone" shows that any female would serve his purpose to make him *a man*, because: "The two of them together would make one Jude."[43] The whole idea of marriage was "his conquest,"[44] stressing out a gained social position and his benefits. In fact, marriage is presented as business that has to be conducted if a man wants to be perceived as a leader possessing certain power over somebody's life.

If we focus on what is missing in the scene of adultery, we come to the conclusion that it is the explanation why Jude left Nel. There is none. Jude simply decided to leave his family, break the wedlock, cut all his ties and walk away without any expression of regret. The emotional deficit is disclosed by Marla W. Iyasere, who argues that male characters "achieve their identity through maintaining distance, the males experience a diminished capacity for intimacy."[45] Since boys were brought up by their mothers, they had to "differentiate themselves from their mothers in order to establish their gender identities."[46] As Chodorow puts it, "masculine personality comes to be defined more in terms of denial of relation and connection."[47] Therefore, Jude as a masculine character cannot show any signs of sensibility or emotional involvement.

Reading the novel carefully, we can trace further lines confirming the opinion of Iyasere that men, in order to gain their gender role, have to disentangle their connections to their mothers. Before Jude marries, he feels the need for taking on "a man's role […]. He needed some of his appetites filled, some posture of adulthood recognized. […] And if he were to be a man that someone [he would care of him] could no longer be his mother."[48] Further, nothing suggests that Jude may, in any degree, lose his masculinity after severing his connections with Nel. In spite of the fact that the marriage with Nel made him *a man* and, most importantly, defined his masculinity, this *tie* is not his only masculinizing feature. His maleness is exposed by his offspring, by his entanglement with another woman, Sula, and even by his ability to leave Nel.

[42] Morrison, *Sula* 83.
[43] Morrison, *Sula* 83.
[44] Morrison, *Sula* 83.
[45] Solomon O. Iyasere & Marla W. Iyasere, *Selected Essays and Criticism* (New York, Whitston Publishing Company Troy, 2000), 23.
[46] Iyasere 21.
[47] Iyasere 22.
[48] Morrison, *Sula* 82.

The figure of Jude is one of the only masculine characters in the novel; other male figures represent the opposite values – the loss of masculinity. The highest degree of demasculinization is represented by the Deweys. They are vaguely introduced in the story: "Eva had three such children."[49] In Iyasare's view, "The Deweys' individual identities dissipate completely to merge into one, and they do not only stop growing physically but remain boys in mind."[50] As a matter of fact, the Deweys could not have any offspring; their immaturely shared identity eliminated their capacity for reproduction. Their lost identities gain on significance in the closing part of the novel, where Morrison depicts a collapse of the community.

Morrison's novel *Sula* starts and ends in the same place – with a description of the collapse of a vibrant and racially determined community. She puts emphasis on her language, carefully chooses words that deliver the messages to the readers and shape their understanding. The narration is not linear, but rather streaked. The readers explore glimpses that represent individual years and events which seem to be the most significant ones from the narrative standpoint. At one moment, as I have already said, the third person narrator even switches to the first person narration in order to achieve more personal, thus self-concerned, female perception. Some affairs are deliberately reduced to short references, such as Eva's walk away from the community: "…she left all of her children with Mrs. Suggs, saying she would be back the next day. Eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon…"[51] Also Sula's disappearance lasting one decade is commented on by a single sentence: "It would be ten years before they saw each other again, and their meeting would be thick with birds."[52]

In this chapter, the novel *Sula* has been scrutinized with an attempt to find some aspects of feminism. It has been shown that some elements of feminism, more or less unconscious, are traceable in the work of the author who declares that in her heart she is not supportive of any hegemonic discourse, whether feminist or patriarchal. Thus, the patriarchal settlement of the society is weakened in the novel by the demasculinization of the male characters and the masculinization of the main heroine. Sula's attitude challenging traditional values established in literature represents what Morrison defines as a "struggle between the claims of community and

[49] Morrison, *Sula* 37.
[50] Iyasere 23.
[51] Morrison, *Sula* 34.
[52] Morrison, *Sula 85.*

individual hubris."[53] Morrison creates a character whose objection is not to be illuminated with virtues. Sula is not a floral tribute to the patriarchal settlement, but a poisonous berry refusing motherhood as a bundling social concept hindering her from self-determination and freedom. Sula's extreme rejections of all traditions and established morality are the cause of her decease. In spite of the fact that Sula's deeds are repulsive, Morrison raises the question what is "good" and what is "evil" and who is the moral authority with the power to decide these concepts. Seemingly simple questions demand deep analysis of how much our judgments and perceptions are based on inherited morals constructed by the gender in power. The patriarchal stratification of gender roles necessarily had to design a moral code transferring from generation to generation in support of male social dominance. However, the novel is void of any specific proposals. The only author's demand is to think about the themes that are embedded in the novel.

[53] Morrison, *"Unspeakable Things Unspoken"* 5.

3. Re-represented Woman in *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is considered to be one of the most significant books of the last three decades. As usual, Morrison combines the aesthetic qualities of her language with political issues that, inherently, are the main motives for her activities as a writer and a critic. The complexity of her thoughts does not allow the readers to discover all the meanings conveyed by the text at the first or even the second reading. Her demands on the readers are enormous and even her ambiguous conclusion does not attempt to offer an uncomplicated view. Rather than presenting a resolution, which may be one-sided, subjective or even disputable, she provokes the readers to think about outlined issues and take into consideration the non-stereotypical perceptions embedded in the book. Since the novel is extremely rich in meanings, this chapter focuses only on the historical inconsistencies of the slave narratives that conveyed one of the first representations of black women, and thus contributed to the stereotypical perceptions that are torn down by Morrison. Further, it directs its attention to the African-American woman, her place in society determined by gender and race, and other issues related to the female perspective as they are represented in the novel.

As Morrison claims in the preface to the novel, she was inspired by the real story of Margaret Garner. Therefore, the whole novel is a female-centered story associating historical events, which, as she puts it, addresses "contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's 'place'."[1] Obviously, when a writer concerned with the political aspect of her work, as Toni Morrison truly is, decides to picture historical events, she has to be looking for something more than a mere background for her novel. As many critics have pointed out, Morrison's intention was to change the stereotypical perceptions of slavery that were mainly based on slave narratives. These popular would-be-true-to-the-subject-autobiographies often claimed to be real manifestos of slave life stories. For example, in an introduction to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Lydia Maria Child wrote: "This peculiar phase of Slavery has generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I willingly take responsibility of

[1] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage International, 2004) xvii.

presenting them with the veil withdrawn."[2] In spite of her manifesto, the reality was much nearer to the opposite. Slave narratives did not aim to present an unbiased description of this controversial part of American history. In general, these publications were paid for by abolitionists; they were commonly censored by these patrons. Therefore, the truth was closer to the declaration of Harriet E. Wilson, who wrote: "I have purposely omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home."[3] If Morrison intended to re-represent a black woman, a real woman, who would be disengaged from all stereotypical perceptions, she had to dispatch historical discrepancies first.

Since slave narratives were censored and purposely incomplete testimonies, Morrison had to reply to their "narrative truth"[4] by her re-representation that touched upon the omitted themes or, in the words of Jennifer Lee: "[filled] in the gaps that the slave narratives left."[5] In general, the slave narratives were not designed to convey any psychological analysis of the slaves. Their aim was to overpass and ignore the self-identities of the slaves, as if they were drained of emotions except for a few senses that are observable in animals. The common opinion of that time, even among abolitionists, was that the Blacks were culturally and emotionally inferior. Paradoxically, their subordinated status was advocated by the slave narratives with a pose of true-to-the-subject autobiographies. In *Beloved*, the manipulation with historical facts, the power to propagate subjective or even false perceptions as empirical evidence, is embodied in the figure of the schoolteacher. He symbolizes racial, gender and cultural supremacy, because he has power over slave lives and, further, he can influence how slaves will be looked upon by later generations. According to Morrison: "Nothing in the world [is] more dangerous than a white schoolteacher."[6] Since the male school teacher has supreme authority, his would-be-truth becomes universal knowledge that is then spread among his white students and possibly passed to later generations. Analogously, the life experiences of the slaves were twisted by subsequent censorship or by some patrons who wrote down the stories for illiterate fugitive slaves.

[2] ed. Nancy Peterson, *Toni Morrison Critical and Theoretical Approaches* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993) 186.
[3] ed. Peterson 185.
[4] Jennifer Lee, *Narrative Conventions and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 5
[5] Lee 81.
[6] ed. Peterson 181.

In Jenifer Lee's opinion: "ideology is inherent in literacy because it is defined by the dominant culture, literacy is not ethically neutral and it can be used for many purposes."[7] This includes designed representations of a certain minor group of people whose image of inferiority is politically and economically profitable for the dominant group. An example of this attitude can be traced in the scene where the schoolteacher beats a slave who dared to present his own opinion: "schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined."[8] Schoolteacher's power to present his view of the world, his would-be-truth, and authority to pass it further is also evident in the scene where Sethe's characteristics are divided into animal and human. First, the schoolteacher asks one of his students which slave he is describing. His question is formed in a very impersonal way: "Which one are you doing?" Then, he corrects his perception and imposes his opinion: "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal on the right."[9]

Obviously, literacy was used by the white dominant culture to maintain its superior status, its power. According to Claudine Raynard, the figure of the schoolteacher "represents scientific racism."[10] Whenever the schoolteacher appears, stereotypical representations of a black woman rise to the surface like an oil spill and give Morrison an opportunity to reshape its outlines by her tool of language. Yet her strategy is immediately distinguishable from the methods used by her antecedent writers. As Caroline M. Woidat declares, 19th century black women writers attempted to present an image of the black female that would be disengaged from "animal characteristics,"[11] disconnected from the status of "breeders and mules."[12] The new image was derived from the "white image of virtue"[13], thus artificially ascribed to a black woman. Jenny Sharpe's work on slave narratives speaks in accord with this view. She explicitly points out: "The slave woman acts, then, only inasmuch as she exhibits the moral agency of an enlightened individual."[14] An example of a slave narrative where the righteousness of a black female is designedly stressed out is *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist: Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith, and Her Travels in America,*

[7] Lee 80.
[8] Morrison, *Beloved* 225.
[9] Morrison, *Beloved* 229.
[10] ed. Tally 46.
[11] ed. Peterson 184.
[12] ed. Peterson 184.
[13] ed. Peterson 184.
[14] Jenny Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery : A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 120.

England, Ireland, Scotland, India, and Africa as an Independent Missionary. Sharpe also mentions the reasons that drove such a method of depiction. The objectives of the slave narratives strived to provoke public discussion resulting in the abolition of slavery. Sharpe is aware of the fact that "even the slightest hint of […] impropriety could have destroyed […] credibility"[15] of runaway slaves. If the contemporary literature presented a woman of virtues who was subdued to a man, this method had to be implemented by the slave narratives, because the domesticated woman of gentle manners became "the model of womanhood against which slave women's actions were measured."[16]

This strategy was not acceptable to Morrison, who rather created a distinct heroine unburdened by stereotypes. It is necessary to point out that Morrison's objectives were discrepant from the works of Maria Child, Harriet E. Wilson and Amanda Smith. Morrison's onerous task was not to present arguments in support of the Blacks showing that they are cognitive human beings who ought to be freed from their chains. That challenge had been achieved by her predecessors. Instead, she strived to adjust the method of depiction to a real black woman. Therefore, her reconstructed character does not resemble either an animal or a saint or a lady of virtues. The heroine, Sethe, is shaped or rather stigmatized by the traumatic experiences that she endured as a slave living in a racist society. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Sethe's hotheaded reactions and impetuous responses distinguishing her from the ideal models of womanhood are the products of her unconsciousness affected by emotional stress and physical injuries.

Indeed, Morrison uses specific slave narratives as a basis for her re-representation of history. She deliberately draws attention to daily experiences of African-Americans as they were depicted in well known slave narratives and then interweaves a psychological dimension into the intellectually plain stories which enables her to explore the psychological, social, economic and, possibly, gender impacts of slavery. Thereupon, we can find various echoes and allusions to famous slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. In his censored story, for example, Douglass claims that he is unsure about his precise birth date: "I have no accurate knowledge of my age"[17], because he was separated from his mother as a child. In fact, this was a common and purposeful practice at the time of

[15] Sharpe 121.
[16] Sharpe 121.
[17] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Penguin, 1986) 47.

slavery, because masters wanted their slaves to be ignorant and illiterate for obvious reasons. The separation of mothers and their children is thematised in a scene where Beloved asks Sethe whether her mother combed her hair: "Your woman, she never fixed up your hair?" "My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don't remember. I didn't see her but a few times in the fields. […] I didn't even sleep in the same cabin most nights I remember."[18]

Another example of a revised slave narrative may be the scene where Sethe and Amy cross the river Ohio. The situation is possibly derived from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - an anti-slavery novel written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which was inspired by the autobiography of Josiah Henson. In her attempt to point out some inconsistencies in this abolitionist text Morrison wrote: "Sethe and Amy did not find a riverboat to stow Sethe away on, or a ferryman willing to take on a fugitive passenger – nothing like that – but a whole boat to steal."[19] This sentence hints at the original text that goes on: "Isn't there any ferry or boat, that takes people over to B——, now?" [Eliza, the runaway slave] said." [20]

As I have already stated, the status of the black woman in literature is extremely low; she is often compared to a horse. For example, when Sethe thinks about some privileges of men from the 'Sweet Home' slave farm, she gives this list of rights: "To buy a mother, choose a horse or a wife, handle guns."[21] Morrison emphasizes the lowest status of woman by placing her behind a horse in the quoted list. Also, the schoolteacher compares Sethe to a horse after her brutal beating. Another perception of a slave woman was as *a breeder* who multiplies the property of her owner. The racist patriarchal society, as Barbara Christian points out, reduced the identities of female slaves to a mere commodity multiplying its value: "Afro-American motherhood, then, was seen by the planters as a necessity in the continuation of the American economy, an essential part of which was slavery."[22] This conception of womanhood is also referred to in the novel. When Sethe recalls the advice that was given to her by Baby Suggs, she realizes how slave women were expected "to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them."[23] Further, when the schoolteacher speculates about the market price of every single slave, he, in his

[18] Morrison, *Beloved* 72.
[19] Morrison, *Beloved* 45.
[20] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Westminster: Modern Library, 2000) 75.
[21] Morrison, *Beloved* 147.
[22] Christian 222.
[23] Morrison, *Beloved* 247.

mind, addresses Sethe as "the breeding one"[24] and a few pages later he comes to the conclusion that Sethe's price would be higher in comparison to another slave, because she was "property that reproduced itself without cost."[25] In fact, a prominent feature of slave fertility was economical profitability. Again, this opinion is clearly voiced by Barbara Christian: "The settlers […] designed Afro-American woman as the bearer of slaves […]."[26]

In spite of the fact that Morrison does not explicitly consider herself to be a feminist, she does not neglect the opportunity to point out how unequal status was given to females, black or white, in history. A general concept of feminism is summarized by Caroline Ramazanoglu, who approaches the umbrella term stating that "…feminism addresses women across their social differences, on the grounds that common interests can be found wherever gender relations are unjust."[27] Hence, the general gender disadvantage is depicted in the novel, namely, in the scene where Sethe meets a white girl. Amy, the white girl, is, to a lesser degree than Sethe, impoverished by society because of her gender. Morrison described both girls as: "two lawless outlaws – a slave and a barefoot whitewoman."[28] Amy paints in bright her life situation by these words: "My mama worked for these people to pay for her passage. But then she had me and since she died right after, well, they said I had to work for em to pay it off."[29]

However, the figure of Amy does not function as an imaginary connection between females of all races that should unite them in a collective fight for equal opportunities. That would be a false interpretation. Moreover, we would not find evidence supporting this reading in any other novel or essay by Morrison. Rather, Morrison intends to tear down a stereotypical perception of a heroine who is essentially powerless, helpless or even foolish, and who, in Trudier Harris' opinion, "never realizes what difficulty she is in until some man tells her and proceeds to rescue her."[30] In the novel, no man rushes to rescue Sethe. Instead, Sethe manages to escape all by herself and gives birth to a baby with a little help from a white girl. As Chodorow explains, the sense of dependence is a result of the culturally determined role of a mother. Michael Hersen summarizes the concept of a powerless heroine stating that mothering "produces a sense of

[24] Morrison, *Beloved* 267.
[25] Morrison, *Beloved* 269.
[26] Christian 222.
[27] Ramazanoglu 7.
[28] Morrison, *Beloved* 100.
[29] Morrison, *Beloved* 41.
[30] Harris 153.

similarity, continuity, and connectedness among females and helps to explain why it is more difficult for females to achieve a sense of independence and autonomy."[31] Both females, Amy and Sethe, demonstrate their power to survive. While Amy's nature is not weakened by maternal tenderness, Sethe is transformed into a strong maternal figure. Thus, the stereotype of the helpless heroine is challenged by them.

At the beginning of the novel, Sethe is described as a weak nurturer lacking sovereignty. She is a woman whose characterization is based on devotion and care. Later in the book, Sethe affirms that: "all I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl."[32] However, her character changes due to traumatic experiences gained as a slave and a fugitive slave. Temporarily, Sethe becomes a masculine character. All suffering and life through traumas makes her stronger. In consensus with Harris' definition of masculinity which is, in his point of view, associated with "the power over life and death that is stereotypically identified with males or with […] masculine mother"[33], Sethe transforms into a masculine female. This transformation is commented upon by Sethe herself who thinks to herself with a surprise: "I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own."[34]

In a certain sense, her achievement, her escape to freedom, temporarily inscribes masculine characteristics to her figure. For a short period of time, she becomes, as Harris calls it, "a masculine mother"[35] who has power over her life and, moreover, the lives of her children. The "old Sethe" would not be capable of murder, but a masculine mother does not feel constrained and reaches for a handsaw. She chooses whether her child should rather die than live as a slave. She decided to fight against the system of slavery the only way she knew – by harsh violence against the aggressor. Therefore, her brutality is depicted as a direct consequence of her experiences as a slave. While arguing with Paul D, Sethe says: "It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and keep them away from what I know is terrible."[36] Indeed, Sethe's horrifying deed can be understood as a disestablishment of the mamma stereotype, which is based on nurturing and physical power.

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[31] Maryka Biaggio and Michel Hersen, *Issues in the Psychology of Women* (Hingham: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) 52.
[32] Morrison, *Beloved* 19.
[33] Harris 158.
[34] Morrison, *Beloved* 190.
[35] Harris 158.
[36] Morrison, *Beloved* 194.

However, after Sethe's release from prison, the features of a nurturer prevail in her characteristics again. Her nurturing nature is expressed by her constant presence in the kitchen either in her house or in the kitchen of her white employers. Clearly, she adopted a type of labor designed for her gender and, furthermore, for her race. Morrison even underlines her foster features by this claim: "She had milk enough for all."[37]

The masculinization of Sethe's character, her decision to take a weapon and defend herself by the same means used by the white society against her, is not the only consequence of slavery affecting the souls of African-American women. Another huge psychological problem resides in the lack of self love that, in certain instances, leads to a complete loss of the self. The one who acknowledges problematic relations of formal slaves towards their own existence, their traumatized and eventually lost selves, is Baby Suggs. Her depiction resembles features that Harris ascribes to a common folklore figure of an "authoritative mother/goddess."[38]

If one[39] critical evaluation of the novel compares it to Exodus, it is mainly because of the figure of Baby Suggs, whose escape from slavery evokes Moses' exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Evidence of this connection can be seen in the passage where Baby Suggs is followed by a crowd: "When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great herd to the Clearing."[40] It is interesting to notice that while all the Israelites left Egypt, because sick or ill people were carried on the stretchers, only those "who could make it through" followed Baby Suggs. Morrison suggests that the weak ones did not have a chance to escape. It is a reason why masculine qualities have to be temporarily ascribed to Sethe who, otherwise, would not have made it through.

Another allusion that creates an imaginary link between Baby Suggs and Moses is the reference to a stick, Moses' attribute. When Baby Suggs goes to an open place to worship God, she is followed by the crowd, which, in a certain sense, mirrors Moses' passage to the desert. The narrator opens her oration with a claim: "They knew she was ready when she put her stick down."[41] On the one hand, the speech delivered by Baby Suggs resembled Moses' declamation, but, on the other hand, it distinguished the heritage and destiny of the Jews and the Blacks. "She

[37] Morrison 118.
[38] Harris 158.
[39] Morrison, *Beloved* the back cover.
[40] Morrison, *Beloved* 102.
[41] Morrison, *Beloved* 103.

did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure."[42] Instead, she addressed their biggest hardness, their absent self-respect, self-esteem and self-love. Baby Suggs simply screamed: "You got to love it, you."[43] Moreover, the absence of self inherited from slave narratives is even emphasized by the impersonal pronoun 'it'.

In addition, the figure of Baby Suggs bears some signs of a matriarch. And the whole community seems to resemble the prevailing female influence of her household. When one of the few male figures of the novel recalls some long past disputes with Baby Suggs, he thinks to himself that he should: "get right with her and her kin."[44] At that time, Baby Suggs' family consisted entirely of females: Sethe, Denver and Beloved. There is no male head of the "kin"; the males were either "gone or dead."[45] Further, when Denver decides to seek help in the community, she goes straight to Ella who "convinced the others that rescue was in order."[46] These *others* are, again, women who together represent sufficient power to exorcise the ghost who is, how else, a female. In this respect, Morrison uses community as a source of power. This strategy is similar to Walker's concept of womanism that is, in addition to other features, based on solidarity among the fellowship of women.

Although Morrison does not support feminism, because, as she says in *Playing in the Dark*, it would be a mere "change of dominations"[47], it is not possible to leave aside the fact that her novel presents the matriarchal settlement of African-American communities as more or less natural. She differs from writers such as Ralph Ellison or Richard Wright, who predominantly depicted males in a strictly patriarchal order. For that reason, Morrison may be seen as a feminist author; if we interpret her peaceful method of feminism as a depiction of the world in the way it is perceived and experienced by women. At the end of the novel, Morrison three times repeats the ambiguous sentence: "This was not (is not) a story to pass on,"[48] which suggests, among other interpretations, that some kinds of experiences are incommunicable, that you must put yourself into the place of those who underwent them in order to understand their deeds and reactions.

[42] Morrison, *Beloved* 103.
[43] Morrison, *Beloved* 104.
[44] Morrison, *Beloved* 213.
[45] Morrison, *Beloved* 164.
[46] Morrison, *Beloved* 301.
[47] Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* 8.
[48] Morrison, *Beloved* 323-324.

Without personal involvement or without a high degree of empathy, it is not possible to detect the true nature of the story and genuine participation of women.

As usual, Morrison successfully challenges stereotypes prevalent in literature. Her method is based on straightening the inconsistencies of slave narratives. She takes the crooked mirror presenting the history in a way suiting white patriarchy and lets her flowery language clean the looking glass. Since she is aware of the fact that no perception can be objective, she does not tell the readers what conclusion they should arrive at. Her methodology is free of one-sided apprehension of reality that has to be observed from a variety of angles. Nevertheless, she does not fail in her attempt to re-represent a black female as a heroine who possesses as many virtues as any common human being and whose deeds are stigmatized by the horrors she lived through. Sethe did not come into the literary world to win the sympathy of the readers. She, as an African-American woman, was created to fight the stereotypes that the society ascribes to her gender and her race.

4. The Concept of Womanism in *The Color Purple*

The influence of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* aroused emancipation and theological movements that have gained immense numbers of followers, among whom may be traced philosophers, theologians and social activists. The novel is unique in many respects, including its use of the Black English vernacular, which is characteristically informal, contrasting with an epistolary form that is, antagonistically, mostly connected with formal discourse. Walker is also exceptional for her courageous approach to depicting the living conditions of black women that involve themes such as rape, which is tabooed by the current African-American community, because of all the negative emotions that the perception of a black man as a rapist stir up. Kheven LaGrone compares Walker's depiction of the black men to "Black male bashing"[1] and, as LaGrone notices, David Bradley even wrote that "her writings were troubling because they suggested that the author had a high level of enmity toward black men."[2] Nevertheless, Walker's intention of liberating black women from the grips of the patriarchal society could not be suppressed by a wave of disapproval arising among black male critics and theologians. Her concept of womanism, derived from a global perspective of feminism and adjusted to the specific conditions of African-American women, is a central notion of the novel. As Gladys J. Willis points out, Walker's "Womanist theology presents a case against three isms – racism, sexism, and classism – that stifle the progress of a Black woman."[3] Therefore, the objective of this chapter is an exploration and detailed explanation of the established concept of womanism in relation to the themes of racism, sexism, and classism as they are depicted in the novel *The Color Purple*.

As Dierdre Glenn Paul says: "The term 'Womanist' was first introduced by Alice Walker."[4] Obviously, Walker felt a great urge to define a concept of feminism, narrower in its essence, which would suit the distinct social status of black females, their spirituality and cultural heritage. Gladys J. Willis throws light on the matter of her reasons: "In the sixties, […] a Black woman

[1] ed. Kheven LaGrone, *Dialogue, Volume 5 : Alice Walker's The Color Purple* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 17.
[2] ed. LaGrone 17.
[3] Gladys J. Willis, *Alice Walker's Influence on Womanist Theology* (Xlibris.com, 2006) 36.
[4] Dierdre Glenn Paul, *Life, Culture and Education on the Academic Plantation : Womanist Thought and Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001) 2.

could not identify with the Feminist Movement, because White women could not embrace the concept of racism or classism."[5] Therefore, Walker's term reflects the black woman in her true racial essence which includes the notions, in Anthony Reddie's words, of "self-determination, self-definition, the love of oneself, a commitment to holistic living, solidarity with other women, and a respect for the experience and knowledge claims that arise from the reality of being a black woman."[6] It is crucial, for a thorough understanding of the novel and its choice of vocabulary, to acquaint oneself with the concept of womanism and to read the novel as a womanist text.

The list given above specifying the core signs of womanism puts a strong emphasis on aspects of the self. This approach to a black identity is in sharp contrast with the broken identities of slaves who, as depicted in slave narratives, did not possess their lives; thus, their personae were deformed and their self-approach purposely problematized by the institution of slavery. *The Color Purple* presents the concept of womanism. The benefits of womanist teaching are shown by the example of the awakened Celie. Womanism stresses the demand for self-love as a necessary condition of a state of well-being and contentment, which is one of the main objectives of the conception. The issue of restricted capacity for self-respect and self-love is also addressed by Morrison in *Beloved.* After the fashion of Moses, during the ceremonial gathering at the Clearing, Baby Suggs commands her fellows to love their selves, because they are "Flesh that needs to be loved."[7] Morrison's authoritative effort to heal the broken identities stands in contrast to Walker's gradual didactic approach teaching how to love the self through the deeds and the voice of Shug.

According to Walker, all means of pleasing oneself are regarded as allowable. The appeal for self-pleasing is reflected in the novel. An example is the dialogue between Shug and Celie. Self-confident Shug teaches Celie that pleasure is not in contradiction with what Celie considers acceptable: "God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoys 'em a lot more. You can just relax, go with everything that's going, and praise God by liking what you like."[8]

[5] Willis 16.
[6] Anthony Reddie, *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 101.
[7] Morrison, *Beloved* 104.
[8] Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985) 203.

Obviously, the concept of womanism is bound up with theological perceptions. The whole theory that prefers the self-growth of black women starts and ends with God. However, the idea of God is slightly redefined. Generally, God is understood as a patriarchal figure justifying the patriarchal ordering of modern society that maintains male hegemony, which, in many feminists' views, should be done away with. This conception of God is described, with a slight irony in the tone, by Shug: "He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted."[9] This classical comprehension of God is in a sharp contrast with the process of emancipation that is aiming to see a black female free from male limitations and, more importantly, free from white restraint. A gradual process of gaining independence, the objective of womanism, is mirrored in Celie who first awakens sexually and spiritually through the guidance of Shug, then, in the effect of a phased growth, she awakens even economically. The redefinition of God as a necessary requirement of womanist emancipation is described by Celie's words: "Trying to chase that old white man out of my head."[10] Further, Celie perceives the change in her personal apprehension of God when she claims in a letter to her sister Nettie: "I don't write to God no more. I write to you. […] Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown."[11]

As Anthony Reddie points out: "Womanist theology has and remains a challenge not only to 'mainline black theology,' but also to all black male theologians."[12] Indeed, Walker's redefinition of God clashes with traditional theology that is firmly embraced by male clergy. That may be the reason why some critics perceive womanism as an atheistic conception. For example Willis argues:

> Womanist theology […] is based on non-Christian ideology. It begins with culture, rather than with God and the Bible as the primary source. For the womanist theologian, God is not the first principle, but, rather, the autonomous Black woman who will freely make whatever choices she wishes to make – choices determined by her own self-will, independent of God.[13]

[9] Walker 201.
[10] Walker 204.
[11] Walker 199.
[12] Reddie 19.
[13] Willis 36.

Nevertheless, Willis' reading of the novel inconceivably marginalizes passages openly decelerating God's ominous presence in the womanist theology. Repeatedly, through the voice of the emancipated Shug, Walker claims: "God is inside you and everybody else, you come into the world with God"[14] and few lines later: "I believe God is everything, say Shug."[15]Above all, Shug's declaration that "God wrote the bible, white folks had nothing to do with it"[16] proves Willis to be manipulating the facts when she tries to persuade the readers that womanism is diverting from the Scripture. Even Celie announces that life without its spiritual dimension would be too harsh: "Trying to do without [God] is a strain."[17]

Furthermore, the main reason why critics like Willis clearly despise the womanist movement is its advocacy of lesbian relationships that are presented as an alternative to unequal relationships between the opposite sexes. Willis declares: "I reject Alice Walker's definition of the womanist, which embraces homosexuality, as the basis for developing womanist theology."[18] However, the homosexual relationship is presented as a means of breaking traditional hegemonic ties subordinating females to the patriarchal order. If Anthony Reddie perceives womanism as a concept dealing with "issues and struggles for self-determination, respect, and freedom,"[19] the freedom should be understood as a complete freedom permitting women to express their self without any restrictions which, inherently, embraces sexual freedom. It is Shug who teaches Celie how to love herself and, moreover, how to enjoy all pleasure: "There's a lot of other things I can do that […] God likes. […] I can lay back and just admire stuff. Be happy. Have a good time."[20]

The ability to love oneself and, more precisely, the capacity for sexual liberation is understood as an unstudied display of emancipation by many feminists. One of them is Barbara Christian, who declares: "the love/sex relationship between Celie and Shug is at the center of the novel and is presented as a natural, strengthening process through which both women, as well as the people around them, grow."[21] Also Chodorow makes a summary of the approach by Shulamith Firestone

[14] Walker 202.
[15] Walker 202.
[16] Walker 201.
[17] Walker 200.
[18] Willis 60.
[19] Reddie 19.
[20] Walker 200.
[21] Christian 184.

which is in conformity with the appeal for a sexual liberation: "For Firestone, individualism goes along with a liberated sexuality."[22]

Indeed, Shug is convinced, in conformity with the concept of womanism, that women have an inalienable right to seek their own prosperity. Her attitude towards men brings together her claim: "I would never be fool enough to take any of them seriously […], but some mens can be a lots of fun."[23] Obviously, Shug learned how to gain personal advantage and pleasure out of relationships that used to be beneficial for men only. She boldly instructs Celie to follow her love of life in fields that used to be improper for her and accompany her on a way which she would not dare to step on: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in the field somewhere and don't notice it."[24] Her statement is important for two reasons. First, she recognizes God as the origin of all worldly things. As Celie presents her view, which is in conformity with the womanist teaching, God is the giver of all feelings which, in turn, justifies enjoyment of all pleasures as descending from the highest authority. Therefore, it may be inferred that womanism is an anti-ascetic philosophy.

Second, Shug uses the term "the color purple" which is in its substance intentionally ambiguous. One of the meanings relating to the concept of womanism is buried in Walker's lines from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* that functions as a base for her newly developed branch of feminism: "Womanism is to feminism as purple to lavender."[25] Reddie understands the formulation of these thoughts as follows: "Walker is stating that the two traditions are not entirely unconnected, for within the seismic cavern that often separates womanism from feminism is the shared experience of being a woman in a world of male hegemony."[26] However, one of the dividing elements is womanist emphasis on self-indulgence epitomized by Shug whose pleasure seeking posture, core aspect of womanism, gains deeper meanings. Christian argues in response to this theory that:

> [Shug's] insistence on her right to pleasure, that Celie identifies as a male characteristic; in this society such direct womanishness must be twisted into mannishness…ironic twist

[22] Chodorow 84.
[23] Walker 257.
[24] Walker 203.
[25] Reddie 83.
[26] Reddie 116.

> of stereotype…Celie initially sees herself as ugly. It is only after she develops a love relationship with Shug that she, as well as others, sees her natural beauty.[27]

In fact, Celie is a victim of all kinds of oppressions, class, economic, political, racial, and sexual. Facing all these discriminatory practices, she is an ideal example for a depiction of personal growth caused by a liberation springing from the womanist teaching. At first, Celie suffered at the hands of her step father, then in servitude to her husband. Her perception of herself mirrored the manner she had been treated as a child and, later, as a wife. If Buttler-Evans depicts Celie as a "self-described 'black, poor, and ugly' woman with all the suggestions of race, class, and gender oppression implied in that description,"[28] he ignores the fact that her low self-esteem is second-handed by society. Christian mentions the gender based social segregation that is applicable to Celie, who, like other black women living in the patriarchal society, is "no longer bearing the legal status of the slave, but a slave nonetheless in the framework of society."[29]

Actually, it is Celie's husband who insults her by a sexist judgment reducing her identity to something, in its substance, very close to a slave: "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all."[30] Not only is his politically incorrect remark sexist, but it also bears signs of racism and classism. In Tracy West's opinion, Celie's downtrodden identity mirrors the struggles of black women who are confronting "the dual burden of racism and sexism."[31] In fact, Christian sees Celie as a woman "plagued by the sexual advances of men."[32] Her identity is, undeniably, affected by her servitude under patriarchy that persists on an attitude that fosters gender-based discrimination of women. Besides, sexism is a problem of society as a whole, bringing together womanists and feminists in their common fight for emancipation.

In general terms, sexism, the second of three 'isms' that are at the centre of womanist efforts, is understood as a behavior cultivating stereotypes of social roles based on gender. Walker raises an objection against this attitude, such as performed by Mr. ___, when she designs a weak character, Celie. At the beginning of the novel, Celie bears signs of a nurturer or, to adopt the

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[27] Christian 193.
[28] ed. Buttler-Evans 167.
[29] Christian 11.
[30] Walker 213.
[31] Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence & Resistance Ethics* (New York: NYU Press, 1999) 110.
[32] Christian 11.

term used by Trudier Harris, "a healer."[33] Conforming to the narrative strategy of *a bildungsroman*, Walker lets her heroine go through a guided womanist self-growth that, in its consequence, unlaces Celie from stereotypical ties and changes her life from underestimated non-assertive wife "slaving" in her husband's household to emancipated, self-determined woman. In order to describe such a development, first of all Walker deprives Celie of her children and, above all, of her fertility. This narrative strategy points toward the time of slavery when females frequently lost their children, who were sold as a commodity. Moreover, it gives her a chance to fill an empty place in Celie's heart with Shug. Initially, Shug awakes Celie's nurturing, stereotypical, qualities when she is bound to take care of Shug during her illness. However, this artificial mother-daughter relationship is done away with when the two women become lovers. Also, Walker's narration is shaped by an effort for sexual liberation that can be attained only, as Firestone puts it, through a denial of motherhood: "freeing women from their reproductive biology leads to, and is a prerequisite of, a sexual liberation."[34]

In addition, Harris sums up traditional images of women in literature claiming that "women could be witches or healers."[35] This breakdown of the stereotypical gender depiction into two types of roles helps to disclose another concealed aspect of the passage where Celie boldly says to her husband: "I curse you, I say. […] Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble."[36] Celie's declaration identifies the moment of her disentanglement from her stereotypical role that subordinated her to her husband and, in principle, to the whole patriarchal system. From that time on, she is a strong, self-determined character with clear goals in life. She becomes a womanist. That is the very point when Celie's children may be reunited with their mother. Since Celie is no longer a weak nurturer/healer deriving her identity from a role of a traditional mother, she can be rejoined with her children. Her motherhood is redefined, because she is not a mere caregiver resembling what Christian defines as: "all-nourishing mama stereotype,"[37] but an independent woman who happens to be a mother as well. Besides, Celie considers her motherhood to be shared with her sister Nettie, which ascribes to her social role a community-like character. Her free, self-sufficient, womanist identity may be traced in the lines

[33] Harris 153.
[34] Chodorow 84.
[35] Harris 153.
[36] Walker 213.
[37] Christian 28.

that follow: “Dear Nettie. I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children.”[38]

It is interesting to notice what qualities, especially the material ones, are connected with Celie’s state of happiness: money and work. They are closely linked to Celie’s economic and, in fact, social status. When Walker lists them, she points toward another feature marking a distinct disadvantage of a black woman, which is classism. Traditionally, the social rank of black women, with the exception of the so-called high yellow, is associated with low class household occupations including maids, cleaning ladies, laundry women and cooks. Therefore, the awakened Celie could not undertake any of the jobs stigmatized by racial prejudices. At first, she makes money as a dressmaker, then she becomes a designer of pants who hires dressmakers. Walker fully scraps the gender relations of a dressmaker when she draws attention to Celie’s husband sewing pants while humbly sitting next to Celie. Further, since the subject of her business is pants, a major part of the male wardrobe, often used as a marker of patriarchal power, Celie’s independent status as a womanist is underlined. Christian comments on the spiritual and, mainly, economical progress of the main heroine by these words: “Celie in *The Color Purple* [has] known poverty and moved to a point where [she has] more material security.”[39]

Racism and its reflection in the novel is the last theme that will be explored, because its elimination is a primary objective of Walker’s liberating movement. As I have already stated, *The Color Purple* vividly depicts stereotypes in order to offer a new conception, womanism. Some stereotypes are deliberately redefined, such as the conception of motherhood that changes from a black mamma to a shared motherhood adjusted to immediate living conditions. In regard to the issue of racism, Reddie assumes that “Womanist theology utilizes the experience of black women to challenge the […] ills of racism […].”[40] On the other hand, some stigmatizing stereotypical perceptions are revived. For example, the perception of a black man’s nature as sexually assaulting is presented as an ordinary state of affairs in the black community. Walker’s outright criticism of the male part of the black community stirred up a great controversy. As I have already mentioned, her unreserved naming of the ills raised many voices against her works. For example, Ishmael Reed expressed the following about her writing style: “Ms. Walker’s shrill

[38] Walker 222.
[39] Christian 183.
[40] Reddie 98.

attempt to boycott black male writers whose female characters don't adhere to her notion of what an ideal female character should be [...] presumably a tortured, neurotic, unhappy, hateful person, full of hostility towards people whose only crime is that they were born male."[41]Nonetheless, the opinion of LaGrone, who accuses Reed and other like-minded critics of a misinterpretation and "misreading of the role of homosexuality in the story"[42] justify Walker's right to straightforwardly express what she finds to be an underlying cause of hardship among the black women. However, it should be pointed out that Walker's too naturalistic depiction of some violent scenes could be handled in a more nuanced way, perhaps, by using less stereotyped vocabulary. Indeed, there is a short step from a stereotype to racist perceptions that may be easily invoked by those who misinterpret her words. Christian's theory regarding the close link between stereotypes and racism speaks in this manner too: "Stereotype, whether positive or negative, is a byproduct of racism, is one of the vehicles through which racism tries to reduce the human being to a nonhuman level."[43]

In point of fact, the novel is interwoven with racial remarks that are dividable into three groups. The first embraces words stigmatized by their racial usage. Such a term as *niggers* may be traced in Shug's utterance: "The last thing niggers want to think about they God is that his hair kinky."[44] The second group consists of remarks recalling times of slavery when the dominion of one group of people was based on race advancement. For example, Nettie, in one of her letters, questions the fact that white colonists captured the free people of Africa and reduced their identities into a commodity: "Why did they sell us? How could have done it?"[45] The third group comprises of situations describing open race hatred, such as Sophia's quarrel with the mayor and his wife. Since the novel seems to be written in order to teach the subject of womanism on an example of the main heroine Celie, whose identity is gender and race determined, it can be argued that all aspects of the novel are conditioned by this aim.

This chapter has shown that Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* is a didactic piece of work, *a bildungsroman*, introducing the concept of womanism, as derived from the global movement of feminism, in relation to the themes of racism, sexism and classism. The readers, as well as Celie,

[41] ed. LaGrone 16.
[42] ed. LaGrone 16.
[43] Christian 16.
[44] Walker 202.
[45] Walker 145

are guided on their way towards social emancipation and spiritual awakening through womanist teaching. Nevertheless, womanism, a conception coined by Walker, is not a mere subset of feminism. While feminism is a movement stressing the liberation of women as the most significant point, womanism has broader ambitions however adjusted to specifics of the black community. The 'extra' feature is well captured by Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd:

> Walker's definition clearly embraced the political philosophy of feminism, nevertheless she emphasized that 'womanism,' that is, her conception of the practice of antisexist politics, was concerned about the well-being of whole communities, both men and women.[46]

Walker's attempt to contribute to a contentment of the whole community is, in fact, reflected at the end of the novel where awakened and independent Sethe reconciles with her husband. Not only does her emancipation have a positive impact on their relationship, but it is also beneficial to all members of their widely branched family. Lastly, in terms of Walker's narrative strategy, it may be inferred that her writing style is similar to Morrison's; in particular, Walker also leaves enough space to the deductive reasoning of the readers. The issues explored by the novel are arranged in layers structured in a way that does not disclose all implicated meanings at the first sight, which challenges the readers to make their own assumptions based on their individual reading experience.

[46] Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd, *Gender, Race, and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics* (Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 149.

5. Conclusion

The selected novels by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker were analyzed with regard to the feminist aspects incorporated in the stories of their black female protagonists. All these pieces of writing are complex in their intellectual content and in ambiguities with which they respond to the problems of the current African-American society, especially with regard to their grievous slavery past. In other words, the analyzed novels are abundant with themes that may be traced and connections that may be discovered. However, the objective of this thesis was to follow only one thread of the complex web linked to the writers' attitudes towards the difficulties of black women based on the issues of race and gender and their status in the patriarchal society.

The analysis of the novels traced some common features. It may be inferred that the central themes of their works are the re-represented black heroines. Morrison's and Walker's heroines are designed with an emphasis on their inner feelings, because this narrative technique enables the authors to rewrite stereotypes conveyed in slave narratives that ascribed animal characteristics to African-Americans. (The fact that the white authored literature attributed animal characteristics to African-Americans is, for example, commented on in *Beloved*: "Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle."[1])

Further, among the stereotypical perceptions that are challenged in the novels is a powerless heroine stereotype, a woman who is dependent on advice from a man. To be specific, Sula is outlined as a figure capable of anything. Both Sethe and Celie become stronger and, above all, they improve their life conditions with the help of a woman. Specifically, on her flight from slavery Sethe meets a white girl Amy who helps her overcome difficulties. And Celie is guided by Shug on her way for self-knowledge and love of herself.

The significance of the authors' mutual fight against sexism and racism is manifested above all in the shared features of their works. Their confrontation with the persistent problem of discrimination is conveyed in the following quotations that, in my opinion, are some of the most notable manifestations of their dissatisfaction with the place of a black woman in the society. Morrison's critique is voiced by the domesticated Nel, who acknowledges her subordinated

[1] Morrison, *Beloved* 234.

status. Thus, she despises Sula's independence: "You a woman and colored woman at that. You can't act like man. You can't be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't."[2] Walker's disfavor for the low-grade status of black women is hidden between the lines of an insult to Celie: "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all."[3]

Additionally, both writers find community life to be a source of spirituality. However, Walker considers the female community as a place where women find strength based on solidarity and sympathy of their female fellows. As a consequence, friendship is seen as a source of happiness, self-content and, possibly, supplementing the instance of marriage. In contrast, Morrison regards community life as sustaining gender stereotypes. Therefore, her heroine Sula is depicted as an outcast independent of the expectations of the neighborhood and unconcerned with her lack of friends. Another main heroine, Sethe, despite being rescued from the grips of the ghost by her female neighbors, lives at the edge of the community and without friends.

However, in the case of *Sula,* the novel reflects the attitude of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which Morrison perceives as accenting the individual potentials and struggles of black women. She describes this period in this manner: "We were being encouraged to think of ourselves as our own salvation, to be our own best friends."[4] Since *Beloved* was written thirteen years later, its tone bears signs of change in the African-American society. In other words, Morrison's approach to the conditions of the society seems to be more optimistic. The notion of hope springs from the ending of *Beloved* where the community of women unites to rescue Sethe. Even though Sethe lives at the edge of the community, other women do not leave her to the mercy of the ghost. This conclusion contrasts with Morrison's pessimism traceable in the last pages of *Sula* that draw the readers' attention to dangers of disintegration, or decay, of the community life.

Morrison, in comparison to Walker, is more concerned with history and its unjust record in slave narratives. A publically well-known aim of her activity as a writer is an intense effort to change these biased descriptions. She calls attention to the fact that literacy was used by the dominant culture to maintain its superior status. Therefore, her novel *Beloved* is full of allusions to well known passages from famous slave narratives, such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick*

[2] Morrison, *Sula* 142.
[3] Walker 213.
[4] Morrison, *Sula xv*.

Douglass, An American Slave or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an anti-slavery novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Not only do these references fill up the blank spots purposely omitted and call into the question credibility of the literature produced by the dominant race, but they also remedy the crooked perception of the past. Furthermore, the lines of *Beloved* also, almost unwittingly, mention the existence of Douglass*'s* anti-slavery newspaper, the *North Star*.[5]

Walker's concept of womanism is, in contrast to Morrison's preoccupation with the wrongs of the past, designed to empower disadvantaged black women. The strength of black women, in Walker's view, should spring from the unity of women who will encourage their collective emancipation and spiritual awakening. Indeed, Walker attempts to reinforce black women for the future. Even though she recognizes the heritage of slavery as deeply problematic for the whole African-American community, her works disclose a different attitude towards the past, which means that history is not essential for her understanding the present and taking action.

[5] Morrison, *Beloved* 204.

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Summary

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na aspekty feminismu ve vybraných románech afro-amerických spisovatelek, aktivistek a držitelek prestižní Pulitzerovy ceny za literaturu Toni Morrison, která získala i nejvyšší možné ocenění za literární tvorbu a to Nobelovu cenu, a Alice Walker. Cílem práce je detailní analýza dvou románů Toni Morrison: *Sula* a *Beloved* a jednoho románu Alice Walker: *The Color Purple*, přičemž právě poslední dvě jmenovaná díla vynesla spisovatelkám prestiž v podobě ocenění Pulitzerovu cenou. Pro každé z děl je vyčleněna jedna samostatná kapitola, kde jsou rozkrývány spojitosti mezi gendrovým pohledem na problematiku postavení afro-amerických žen ve společnosti, mezi odrazem jejich společenského postavení v literatuře a mezi tématy, která se v daném díle k této otázce přímo vztahují a dále ji rozvíjejí. Čtvrtá kapitola, závěr, se pak snaží analyzovat společné znaky v přístupu spisovatelek k dané problematice a naopak poukázat na aspekty, kterými se jejich narativní strategie a s ní související signifikantní prvky jejich tvorby liší.

Větší část práce si klade za cíl politicky podmíněnou tvorbu Toni Morrison. První kapitola je věnovaná románu *Sula* z roku 1974 zobrazujícímu rasově uniformní černošskou komunitu vyznačující se prvky spiritualismu. Hlavní pozornost se upírá k ženské protagonistce, která, jak deklaruje sama autorka, je světově nově definovanou černošskou postavou odprostěnou od stereotypů vytvořených na základě životopisných vyprávění bývalých otroků, tzv. *slave narativů*, a od nich se odvíjející literární tradice. Prerekvizitou pro konstrukci Suly, jakožto nově definované hrdinky, byla afro-americká komunita, jež musela být očištěna od rasových stereotypů a vykreslena v plné barvitosti svého pulzujícího života. Jak je pro tvorbu Morrison typické, je prostoupena četnými symboly a mnohoznačnými výrazy. Jedněmi z nich jsou metafory ostružiny a blínu vyjadřující niterní podstatu povah postav Nel a Suly. Blín, symbolizující Sulu, má dle Morrison vyjadřovat metafyzickou, kvintesenciální čerň a to jak biologickou tak zvolenou, tedy temnotu Suliny povahy.

Jedno z hlavních témat rozvíjených v souvislosti s postavením žen v tradičně patriarchální společnosti je téma volby. Sula, jakožto hrdinka zbavená mnoha stereotypů rasových a gendrových, dobrovolně volí samotu a vyčlenění ze společnosti, než by se podvolila sociálním

konvencím a zaujala tradiční roly matky, která se od žen žijících v patriarchální společnosti všeobecně očekává. Naopak, její identita je plná nezávislosti jak na komunitě, tak na nejbližších členech její rodiny, které dominují ženy. Je to právě její individualismus, který ji očerňuje v očích ostatních, a kvůli kterému je považována za čarodějnici. Aspekty Suliny identity se odráží jak v postavě Shadraka, který reflektuje její vyčlenění z komunity, tak v postavě její nejlepší přítelkyně Nel, jejíž povahové rysy metaforicky shrnuje symbol plodící ostružiny. Avšak i charakterové vlastnosti Nel dosáhly určitých změn oproti tradičnímu stereotypu černošské matky oplývající fyzickou silou a kyprými tvary.

Mateřství, tak jak je ztělesněno v postavě Nel, doznává mnohem univerzálnější povahy zbavené etnických rysů. Spíše než příslušnost ke komunitě chce Morrison zdůraznit fakt, že mateřství je socio-kulturně podmíněnou koncepcí, díky které se po staletí udržuje patriarchální stratifikace moci. Děti, zprvu zcela závislé na matce, se s ní v počátku života zcela identifikují, aby se během dospívání buďto ztotožnily s její rolí a postavením ve společnosti, nebo, v případě chlapců, aby se od ní citově zcela odpoutali a získali tak vlastní maskulinizovanou identitu. Na tento fakt Morrison poukazuje, když vytvoří postavu Nelina manžela, který svou maskulinní identitu získanou manželstvím neztratí, ani když svou ženu a dítě opustí. Citová deprivace by tak mohla být považována za jeden z aspektů maskulinizace.

Rovněž Sula, která se odmítá podřídit společenskému konsensu, nese známky citové deprivace. Obecně lze říci, že její postava je maskulinizovaná, tedy, jsou jí připsány vlastnosti příznačné pro muže. Ani na naléhání své rodiny se nestane matkou a plně se zaměří na sebe ve snaze najít svou pravou identitu a harmonii. Její individualizmus lze v mnoha aspektech přirovnat k typicky mužskému. Je to dominantní, ekonomicky a sexuálně nezávislá postava, která nejen že stojí v naprostém kontrastu k tradičnímu pojetí role ženy v patriarchální společnosti, ale je také v rozporu se stereotypním zobrazováním afro-amerických žen. Nicméně její proklamovaný individualismus vede k jejímu zavržení a démonizaci.

Morrison jen zdánlivě prezentuje Nel jako naprosto kladnou hrdinku a Sulu jako zkaženou osobu bez morálních zásad postrádající respekt k čemukoliv a komukoliv. Naopak vznáší otázku nad tím, který ze dvou životních postojů je ten správný. Rovněž se táže, na základě čeho konečný verdikt vznášíme a podle kterých kritérií určujeme, kdo je správný a kdo ne. Ale především poukazuje na to, že naše morální měřítka byla stanovena společností, která neváhala zotročit

africké obyvatelstvo a která, byť se považuje za demokratickou, stále udržuje patriarchální uspořádání připisující ženám roli podřízené udržovatelky rodinného krbu.

Druhá kapitola této práce je věnována analýze románu *Beloved,* jehož hlavním cílem je odstranit historické inkonsistence *slave narrativů,* na základě kterých se v literatuře vytvořily dvě tradice stereotypního zobrazování afro-americké ženy buďto jako méněcenné lidské bytosti s některými vlastnostmi typickými spíš pro živočišnou říši nebo, po vzoru dominantní literatury té doby, jako ženy oplývající ctnostmi a křesťanskou morálkou. Kromě přepisování historie se román zamýšlí nad současnou problematikou svobody a role žen ve společnosti.

Morrison tímto románem upozorňuje, že v životopisných vyprávěních bývalých otroků je obsaženo mnoho nesrovnalostí, které má na svědomí tehdejší cenzura a kodifikované normy nastavené dominantní bělošskou literaturou. *Slave narativy* se vyhýbaly příliš živému popisu scén obsahujících brutální násilí a především psychologickým analýzám niterních prožitků bývalých otroků. Záměrné zkreslování pravdy, proti kterému se Morrison snaží bojovat, lze označit jako důmyslný či vědecký rasismus v románu ztělesněný postavou učitele. Tím, že tehdejší literatura prezentovala afro-američany jako duševně ne zcela kompetentní osoby, ovlivňovala nejen tehdejší mínění, ale i všechny další generace, protože tento pokřivený pohled vytvořil stereotyp, který v literatuře přetrvával dál. Morrison vytvořila hrdinku Sethe se záměrem přepsat tyto stereotypy, dokreslit psychologickou dimenzi afro-amerických žen a představit je jako myslící a cítící bytosti.

Morrison především poukazuje na fakt, že status afro-americké ženy v literatuře je velmi nízký, jelikož je často přirovnávaná k plodné klisně či mule, jejíž schopnost reprodukce byla otrokářskou společností přetransformována do výnosného obchodu. Skrze vzpomínky hlavní hrdinky Sethe Morrison kritizuje tuto skutečnost a zamýšlí se nad tím, do jaké míry je koncepce mateřství soci-ekonomickou konstrukcí.

Další stereotyp, který Morrison boří, je tradiční představa, že ženy nejsou schopné adekvátně vyhodnotit situaci a najít východisko samostatně a bez pomoci muže. Nechá proto Sethe projít útrapami na cestě za svobodou, aby ji představila jako silnou postavu nabývající maskulinních vlastností, maskulinní matku, pokud maskulinitu chápeme jako schopnost ovlivňovat svůj osud a mít moc nad životem a smrtí obvykle asociovanými s vlastnostmi mužů. Tyto charakterové vlastnosti se odráží na činech hlavní hrdinky, která ve snaze zabránit zotročení svého dítěte raději

volí jeho smrt. Na tento čin je možno pohlížet nejen jako na redefinici stereotypu mateřství, ale také jako na vzpouru proti otrokářské společnosti redukující schopnost reprodukce na pouhou profitabilitu. Nicméně Sethe je posléze přetransformována v pečující matku, což naznačuje její neustálá přítomnost v kuchyni jak ve své domácnosti tak i při práci pro rodinu rasově privilegované vrstvy. Sethe se tak podřizuje gendrovému a rasovému stereotypu.

Vražda vlastního dítěte je Sethe obhajována jako demonstrace lásky chránící její dceru před hrůzami otroctví. Sethina láska kontrastuje s jedním z důsledků prožitých traumat otroctví, a to s nedostatkem sebelásky a sebeúcty vedoucích až ke ztrátě sebe sama. Problematický vztah k vlastní existenci reflektuje postava Baby Suggs, která svým autoritativním postojem otevřeně apeluje na afro-američany, aby se smířili sami se sebou a naučili se mít rádi sebe sama. Charakter Baby Suggs je konstruován jako protiklad patriarchální hegemonii, protože nese jasné znaky matriarchátu transportovaného z úzkého kruhu rodiny na celou afro-americkou komunitu. Díky této znovuobjevené síle vzít osud sebevědomě do svých rukou se podaří ženám společně vymýtit ze Sethina domu zákeřného ducha její zavražděné dcery sajícího z matky životní energii.

Zobrazování domácnosti jako prostředí ženské nadvlády je pro Morrison poměrně typické. Touto narativní strategií nastavuje zrcadlo patriarchálnímu zřízení společnosti, které pomocí stereotypů prezentovaných jako přirozené uspořádání světa udržuje vlastní hegemonii. *Beloved* na stereotypy a jejich příčiny upozorňuje, avšak nepředkládá žádná jednoznačná řešení, spíše vybízí k zamyšlení se nad postavením afro-amerických žen ve společnosti.

Třetí kapitola bakalářské práce je věnována románu Alice Walker *The Color Purple* z roku 1983 a analýze konceptu womanismu prolínajícího se celou knihou. Womanismus je definovaný jako rasově determinovaný feminismus zaměřující se na boj proti diskriminaci žen. Hlavními znaky hnutí jsou apel na sebeurčení, vlastní rozhodování, sebeláska, holistický přístup k životu a solidarita s ostatními ženami. Walker především akcentuje nový přístup k vlastnímu *já*. Tento přístup zřetelně kontrastuje s problematickou identitou otroků narušenou mnoha faktory. Jedním z nich byla skutečnost, že jejich životy byly ve vlastnictví otrokářů. Otroci byli zbaveni své původní identity tím, že byli vytrženi ze svého původního socio-kulturního prostředí a vrženi do společnosti redukující jejich osobnost na pouhou položku v soupisu majetku.

Patriarchální uspořádání společnosti zapříčinilo, že se afro-americká žena ani po zrušení otroctví nezbavila svého podřízeného postavení založeném na gendrové dělbě práce, v jejímž důsledku

zůstala ekonomicky neautonomní a zcela podřízená mužskému diktátu. Walker se tuto situaci snaží změnit tím, že nabádá k sebelásce a k uspokojení svých tužeb i za cenu překročení sociálních konvencí. Hlavní hrdinka Celie představující utlačovanou a nesebevědomou afro-americkou ženu je konfrontována s Shug, která ji postupně zasvěcuje do tajů rozkoše. Celie se nejprve zdráhá podlehnout těmto příjemným pocitům, protože je pro ni tento sebeupřednostňující přístup k životu v rozporu s koncepcí boha, jež je pro ni nejvyšší autoritou.

Walker ve svém didaktickém přístupu v prezentování konceptu womanismu využívá metodologie sokratovského dotazování. Její metoda se rovněž opírá o dialog, na základě kterého jsou čtenářům odkrývány principy womanistického přístupu k životu. Sethe vystupuje jako zkušená, sebevědomá a samostatná postava přinášející novou definici boha zbaveného patriarchálních rysů, na základě kterých byla práva žen po staletí podřazována mužské hegemonii. Womanistická teologie požaduje ženu celou, holistickou, emancipovanou a duchovně probuzenou. Všudypřítomný bůh je pak spatřován ve všem, co nás obklopuje.

Womanismus není novátorský jen po stránce teologické nebo v přístupu k ženské sexualitě. Rovněž nabádá k individualismu, bojuje s projevy třídní segregace přímo souvisejícími s rasovou diskriminací a se stereotypním zobrazováním afro-američanek jako pradlen, uklízeček, hospodyň či kuchařek. Apel na emancipaci se odráží ve vývoji hlavní hrdinky Celie, která se ze ženy popisující sebe sama jako: ošklivá a chudá černoška, stane ekonomicky soběstačnou a nezávislou osobou, která již tiše nestrpí sexistické urážky svého manžela, ale dokáže se mu vzepřít a zcela se osamostatnit. Aby mohla být Celie podrobena tomuto exemplárnímu osvobození se z limitů patriarchátu, je nejprve připravena o své děti, takže se její sebeurčení nemůže dále odvozovat od role matky. Toto citové vakuum je zaplněno lesbickým vztahem přinášejícím nejen sexuální uspokojení, ale i poznání sebe sama. V okamžiku, kdy se z Celie stane womanistka, shledá se opět se svými potomky. Její mateřská role již neodpovídá klasickému socio-kulturnímu stereotypu pečující podřízené matky, ale získá odlišné kvality založené na společném sdílení výchovy s ostatními ženami, především s vlastní sestrou. Walker zdůrazňuje, že osvobození se z limitů patriarchátu je možné na základě vlastního duchovního rozvoje, naznačuje cesty, jak k tomuto rozkvětu osobnosti dospět, ale stále ponechává dostatek prostoru pro vlastní interpretaci koncepce womanismu a individuální přístup k problematice.

Poslední kapitola vyvozuje závěry z analýz předchozích tří kapitol a snaží se odpovědět na otázku, jaké principy obě autorky spojují a naopak, kterými názory se ve svém nazírání na problematiku žen žijících v tradičně patriarchální společnosti liší. Nejzásadnější odlišnost lze spatřit v tom, jak se staví k feministickému hnutí. Zatímco Walker podnítila vznik feministické odnože, womanismu, bojujícího za práva afro-amerických žen, Morrison feminismus ve své ryzí podobě nepodporuje, protože, jak tvrdí, by to znamenalo pouhé nahrazení jedné hegemonie nadvládou druhé. Odlišný přístup zaujímají i ve vnímání historie, která je pro afro-američany jednoznačně spojena s otroctvím. Obě se sice snaží bojovat se stereotypy vytvořenými otrokářskou společností a objasnit historické nesrovnalosti, ale zatímco Morrison považuje otroctví za břemeno, které si ponesou všechny další generace jako trvalou jizvu na duši, Walker se spíše dívá před sebe, do budoucnosti, nenechává se minulostí svazovat a raději předkládá možnosti, jak by se měly ženy emancipovat a osamostatnit. Sounáležitost žen vidí jako zdroj životní energie plynoucí ze vzájemné podpory a sdílení problémů vyplývajících z postavení žen ve společnosti.