

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

B.A. THESIS
AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIALISATION
Feminism in Selected Novels by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison
Jana Chýlková

The thesis contrasts Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Beloved* with Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. It observes Sula, Sethe and Celie in their struggle against "white patriarchal hegemony" (7), both in real life and in literature. Sula's rebellion is described in negative terms (her deeds are lonely and "repulsive" [21]) and it is argued that Sethe "did not come into the literary world to with the sympathy of the readers" (31); nevertheless, both heroines are also viewed positively: they defy stereotypes and rebel in a way that Ms. Chýlková considers feminist. On the other hand, Walker's Celie is marked by little ambivalence: her 'becoming a womanist' leads to well-being, self-love, self-determination, sexual liberation, holism, etc., all in tune with the author's future-oriented, optimistic, and feminist teaching.

Ms. Chýlková's reading of the protagonists is engaged and informed. The reason why I think the thesis should be graded 'velmi dobre' rather than 'vyborne' is its sketchy treatment of feminism. As I have told the student, if her aspiration is to point out feminist aspects of the three novels, she should go beyond a few references to Chodorow and Firestone. Moreover, as I have also mentioned, I am not sure that Chodorow is used correctly. For example, it is argued that "[a]ll 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" (14). Chodorow certainly highlights social forces that shape women like Nel (and men like Jude), but does she really advocate 'social constructivism'? Also, does she consider mothering merely a burden for women?

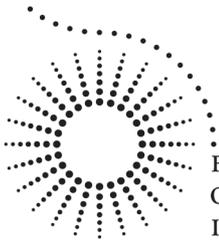
In the same context, I am puzzled by the following section:

[...] 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 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."¹ 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. (27-8)

If women are 'dependent' and 'connected' due to mothering, how do Amy and Sethe *challenge* this stereotype here? Doesn't Morrison in this scene portray women bonding through mothering, precisely as Chodorow describes?

Finally, since the thesis concludes with stressing the differences between the 'past-oriented' Morrison and the 'future-oriented' Walker, I wonder about Morrison's attitude

¹ Maryka Biaggio and Michel Hersen, *Issues in the Psychology of Women* (Hingham: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000) 52.



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towards feminism. The thesis proposes that she “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.” Could any aspects of Morrison’s work be seen as polemical and critical of feminism?

Pavla Veselá, PhD
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