

David Robbins, thesis opponent

B.A. Thesis Evaluation

Jana Chylkova

Feminism in Selected Novels by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker

This thesis compares and contrasts aspects of the gender and race agendas of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, as represented in two works by Ms. Morrison (*Sula* and *Beloved*) and one work by Ms. Walker (*The Color Purple*).

The principal contrast, according to Ms. Chylkova, is between Toni Morrison's race-specific project to restore to black women, in particular, the inner life that was stripped away from them in the polemical and caricatured "slave narratives" of the nineteenth century, and Alice Walker's much more gender-centered and racially inclusive "womanist" approach to understanding (black) women's life- and subject-positions.

Ms. Chylkova's handling of *Sula* is eloquent and insightful. She demonstrates an excellent understanding both of the eponymous main character and of how she embodies an Emersonian rejection of the limited choices and roles to which a society dominated by "white" values and authority structures has traditionally restricted black women. The threat that such unexpected iconoclasm represents both to blacks and to whites, Ms. Chylkova suggests, leads to demonization and rejection of Sula by both races. But it also leads at least the readers of the narrative to raise the issue of the inner forces at work in Sula's consciousness that have characteristically been dismissed, ignored, or overlooked in conventional portrayals of black women.

Morrison's *Beloved* is, in general, better known and more discussed than *Sula*. In the context of that wider and deeper discussion, Ms. Chylkova's handling of some major issues in *Beloved* is less innovative and compelling than is that of *Sula*. Still, she provides several good examples efforts made by black women to reintegrate and revalue both themselves and the actions not valorized by "white" standards and "gentility" that they have chosen in their disadvantaged or threatened condition.

The chapter on Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* nicely summarizes the connections to and diversions from feminist and black liberation tendencies that one finds in the novel's principal "womanist" characters. Ms. Chylkova perhaps slights a bit here the importance of black dialect so important to Ms. Walker's project, but, given the principal thrust of her argument, that is neither surprising nor particularly damaging to the substance of her argument.

All in all, the thesis shows an excellent mastery both of English and of its subject matter. For a bachelor's thesis, it contains a significantly large bibliography; and, at least partly in consequence, of the major debates and critical issues in the field.

Thesis evaluation: "1, vyborne"

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at [drobbins@suffolk.edu](mailto:drobbins@suffolk.edu).