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Theme of Gender in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eyes and Sula

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Abstract: This study deals with Afro-American women novelist namely Toni Morrison. She explores "issues related to Gender which are clearly manifested in their lives and works. This work is a statement of Morrison's anxiety for the debasement of ladies in the public eye. It is around two female heroes who have been conceived and raised by standards and a situation of sexual orientation, sex and love that shape their identities. The female heroes Pocola and Sula speak to two distinct assessments and frames of mind toward sex jobs, sex and love. Pocola pursues the customary standards of society; while Sula for a mind-blowing duration rejects the conventional ideas of ladylike 'duty' and declines to consider ladies to be just spouses and moms. This paper additionally clarifies how these standards and condition of sexual orientation, sex

1. Introduction

"The African American author Toni Morrison is an essayist profoundly worried about issues, for example, race, sexual orientation, sex, and class. A Nobel laureate, she is a standout amongst the most noticeable journalists of fiction in contemporary America," as Raynor, Deidre J. and Butler Johnnella E. (2007:175) note: "The numerous accolades and awards honoring Morrison for her literature testify to her importance as one of the most prolific and talented writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries". Her point of convergence is frequently young ladies and young ladies arranged at the base of African American culture. Morrison expounds on parts of dark life associated with race, sexual orientation, sex, and class, just as about the significance of the precursors in the network. She additionally expounds on recorded and social issues, yet the distinctive individual is dependably the focal point of consideration of gender is a common theme in Morrison's works and encourages her to build up her title of sex, love, and persecution.

2. Theme of Gender in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eyes and Sula"

Gender is significant in the construction of self. Gender is the condition of being male and female Morrison investigates the world of gender is precisely one of those starts where there is a sense of the vague, tangled,

chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing " Over the past few centuries, prevalent gender conventions have reflected an uneven balance of power between the sexes diffused into the minds of all members of society. The norms and conventions of society influence the mind of the people, and the gender conventions handed down to us by our ancestors, relatives and immediate environment are no exception to this. Gender signifies the description of the self, the condition of being man and woman.

The word gender has acquired the new and useful connotation of cultural or attitudinal characteristics (as opposed to physical characteristics) distinctive to the sexes. That is to say, gender is to sex as feminine is to female and masculine is to male," According to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, however, the words are interchangeable. She relates that she used them in composing her legal briefs about sex/gender related matters so the word sex would not appear on every page.

Supposedly her secretary encouraged this saying: "Don't you know those nine men [on the Supreme Court, when] they hear that word their first association is not the way you want them to be thinking (Case 1995:109). The term gender has generally been used in social or cultural contexts, in distinction from biological ones. This was particularly associated with language. The first known use of the word gender was listed as 1387 CE when T. Usk wrote "No mo genders been there but masculine and femynyne, all the remnaunte been no genders but of grace, in faculte of grammar (Simpson and Weiner 1989: 50)." This context for gender has been expanded so that since the 1960s or 1970s the word is often used as a euphemism for the sex of a human being but the intended emphasis remains on the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological. United States Supreme Court Justice Anthony Scalia, in an attempt to clarify usage of the terms has written (J.E.B. 1994:114)

The term 'Gender' is commonly confused with the term 'Sex', but in a social context sex is different from gender. 'Gender' refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women, and 'Sex' refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women (WHO). Almost all of Morrison's books talk about the issues of African Americans, especially the women, who suffered from slavery, rape, and humiliation "due to their social status and their "skin colour. However, she even talks about how these women challenged their fates and the society.

Through a "critical analysis of Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye (1970)" consider black "women "have "challenged "the "simultaneous "effects racism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, media exploitation, and other forms of social violence through a complex "interplay "of storytelling,

auto-ethnography"spiritualized feminism, "other"forms intersectional"praxis. black feminists"have"resisted rage, "alienation, "and despair through community-building, humour, and the cultivation of self-love, effectively reframing scholarly"discussions"of"subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and political agency"“In the Late 20th and Early 21st Century.Finally, she explore the"emancipatory"potential of black feminism, "with special attention paid to how gender urges us to" decolonize"the"politics of knowledge"in the academy by "worrying the lines" between teaching"and learning, power and marginality, past and present, fatalism"and"futurity"and "the real" and the unreal.

The novels of Toni Morrison *The Bluest Eyes*(1970)and *Sula* (1973), has dealt with the themes of gender Toni Morrison's novels"address the impact of gender"on identity, specifically, the impact of living life as a black person in a black world, surrounded by a white society that both denies and violates blacks.

Toni Morrison's novels, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and *Sula* (1973) explore the fact that African American people's identities are shaped by different factors – such as ancestry, wealth, "education or darkness of their skin. The novels present several different African American families that expose prejudices to their"fellow African Americans and clearly display their special social"status.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison explores young black girls interactions and exposure to cultural backlash of the black female"appearance in the 1940's. Delving into the white dominance"that instills self-hatred and inferiority within the female characters in the novel, Morrison illuminates the heavy influence of white culture. Young black girl perception and self- perception, as shown in Pecola Breedlove, is obliterated from a drastically young age. The pervasiveness of whiteness as the only form of beauty promoted through billboards, movies, and dolls develops negative conceptions of the black girl: invisibility, ugliness, abjection, worthlessness. Morrison's focus on their continual destruction reveals the deeply flawed society that upholds racist and sexist ideology. In doing so, Morrison initiates an incentive for action against the manipulative construct that creates a self-hating, self-destructive black community controlled by white superiority.

Her novel, *The Bluest Eye*(1970), concerns the lives of Claudia and Frieda MacTeer, and Pecola Breedlove. The novel divulges 1940's racist American society and a black adolescent girls' struggle to achieve white ideals of beauty. Subject to victimization from a society that ignores her, Pecola represents the callous treatment of black children and their internalizations of their oppression. Everyone around her, including her own parents and community, makes her feel worthless and disempowered. In an effort to redefine herself to fit a standard of beauty that so adamantly

excludes her, Pecola falsely adopts blue eyes. Pecola Breedlove is driven into a state of madness after she believes she has magically acquired blue eyes.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison explores black females exposure to a standard of beauty within which they cannot identify. The interactions with a society so deeply rejectful of blackness instill a sense of inferiority and hatred that threatens black female perception. Pecola Breedlove's interaction with a white shopkeeper showcases Pecola's cognizance of the rejection and invisibility her blackness grants her in society. In the white shopkeeper, Morrison(1970:22)Pecola notes "the total absence of human recognition-- the glazed separateness."

She is aware of the "interest, disgust, even anger, in male grown eyes." that the people around her see her with. Nonetheless, Pecola is well aware that "the distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her flux and anticipation. Her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, and creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes." (Morrison, 48-49) Pecola believes the white man, Mr. Yacobowski is not interested in interacting or even glancing at her all due to her skin color. He is stout and grows impatient with Pecola's silence. The shopkeeper reacts resentfully when Pecola extends her hand to pay for the candy and harshly grazes her palm with his nails in the process of receiving the coins. Susmita Roye expresses how "nothing can convince these little girls of their otherness more than this utter lack of recognition of their humanity in the eyes of the other, mostly white, people." (Morrison 197:215) The involvement of a white- skinned, blond-haired, blue-eyed beauty ideal in Pecola's society serves as the destructive power that causes her to believe in her own abjection and worthlessness. The experience in the store supports the idea of white superiority and the prevalence of racism that deeply affects Pecola. The interaction ultimately causes Pecola to change her own perception of herself, and instills in her a sense of shame and inferiority.

Pecola Breedlove's experience with Maureen Peal, a light-skinned wealthy girl, progresses Pecola's own comprehension of the appearance she lacks and the implication of the appearance she does possess. After Maureen buys Pecola ice cream following an ugly encounter with some boys from school, Maureen begins to taunt her about seeing her father naked. As Claudia and Frieda come to Pecola's defense, Maureen begins to scream "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly e mos. I am cute!" Pecola, embarrassed and disappointed, seems to "fold into herself, like a pleated wing." (ibid 73) Claudia acknowledges that girls like her and Frieda and Pecola would always be lesser.

(Morrison,1970: 74) "Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and

aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world.” Dorothea Drummond Mbalia distinguishes how Maureen Peal’s appearance in *The Bluest Eye* is associated with “the question of intraracial prejudice based on skin color.” (3) Maureen “sees herself as superior because she looks more like her oppressors.” (3) Maureen verbally attacks the girls by using the same dehumanizing names that the boys at school used towards Pecola. Pecola is defenseless and vulnerable to Maureen and the boys’ degradation. She easily believes her and submits to her insignificance and ugliness.

Although Claudia and Frieda, at the time, do not possess a sense of self-hatred, Claudia becomes aware that Maureen’s appearance is what makes her beautiful. Claudia realizes that the thing to fear is the standards that make girls like Maureen be seen as beautiful and thus, worthwhile.

Pecola’s encounter with Geraldine, a light-skinned woman who encourages her son to play with white children only, reinforces the idea that Pecola’s blackness is deplorable. After luring Pecola into his home, Geraldine’s son Junior traps her in a room and torments her. When Pecola begins to pet Geraldine’s cat, the black cat that Geraldine loves and shows more affection towards than her own son, Junior reacts angrily by violently grabbing the cat. He flings the cat against a window and it slumps weakly onto a radiator.

After Geraldine walks in asking for an explanation, Junior blames Pecola of killing the cat. Geraldine proceeds to examine Pecola, “the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out.” (Morrison, 91) Geraldine orders to Pecola, “get out of my house”, calling her a “nasty little black bitch.” (Morrison, 1970: 92) The ferocity with which Geraldine insults Pecola for what she herself possesses, blackness, demonstrates her own internalizing of whiteness as the standard of beauty. Once she sees Pecola, “she is reminded of everything she has sought to escape-- everything associated with the poor struggling African masses: their physical appearance, their behavioral patterns, their lifestyle, their speech patterns.” It is with an effort to isolate herself from her own identity, one that she disregards but essentially shares with Pecola, that Geraldine lashes out at Pecola by highlighting her blackness. Not only is Pecola rejected by her white superiors, but also by those who share race and her blackness, the component that brings about rejection.

Pecola’s regular experience with violence at the Breedlove household contributes to her own abjection and self-hatred. Morrison divulges the regularity with which “Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking.” (Morrison 1970 :43) Pecola convinces herself that “those

eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights-- if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different." Pecola believes that if she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove would not act as badly as they do. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at the pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes." (Morrison, 46) Pecola perceives her ugliness as a trigger to the violence she is exposed to at home.

She convinces herself that the poor treatment and abuse she witnesses is at the fault of her ugliness. She prays for blue eyes because she believes that they will change her situation at home and stop the brutality between Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove. The Breedloves have even "less claim to stability which is so difficult to develop in a society where blacks are constantly dehumanized by the dominant culture." (Roye 2012 219) Pecola's absence of care and constant exposure to domestic conflict cultivates in her a sense of loneliness and victimization and a desperation for the blue eyes that will alter what she sees, and how others see her.

Pecola Breedlove's false perception in which she acquires bright blue eyes and transcends into a state of madness results from the 1940's prejudiced society that repudiates those that don't identify with the standard of beauty. Pecola's change of mind occurs after she meets with Soaphead Church, a reader, adviser, and interpreter of dreams who takes advantage of young girls. When Pecola pays him a visit asking for blue eyes, he deceives her by telling her to feed poisoned meat to a dog near the porch. He concedes to Pecola that if the dog reacts unnaturally, which it ultimately does, she has been granted her wish of blue eyes. Pecola expresses to a made up friend that she has blue eyes and worries that "even if my eyes are bluer than Joanna's and bluer than Michelena's and bluer than that lady you saw, suppose there is somebody way off somewhere with bluer eyes." (Morrison 1970 : 202) Pecola is convinced that everyone around her, including Mrs. Breedlove and her imaginary friend, is jealous of her blue eyes. While Claudia and Frieda learn to see themselves through their own eyes, Pecola "internalizes white standards, and in order to be accepted, she too makes an adjustment. Her adjustment, however, has detrimental effects that lead to her doom." Pecola's adjustment "involves an impossible transformation from an abject black girl to a valued, beautiful white girl with dazzling blue eyes." (Roye, 2012 : 220) Pecola becomes even more alienated from both white society and black society. She exists in the image created by the racist society as she descends into a state of insanity. Pecola Breedlove's descent to insanity is a result of white and black obsession with whiteness as the standard that defines beauty.

Morrison has written an orderly progression of arguments against hegemonic dictates for gendered roles. Although Morrison is repulsed by

the possibility of using her writing to preach to her audience, she is nonetheless compelled to point us in the direction of opening her audience's minds to better opportunities. By creating characters psychologically, Morrison's characters resist the heterosexual, paternal white default that attempts to dictate gender norms. Morrison's belief that she cannot offer easy answers to the problems that plague her characters (and by extension, our society), but she can, at least, open the door to different possibilities. Her personal belief exemplifies Morrison's ambivalent feelings about the nature of gender that some gendered behaviors are innate; however, because she is not a polemicist, Morrison does not attempt to delineate which behaviors are natural and which are foisted by society. The protagonist in *The Bluest Eye* allows readers to examine gender roles from both sides, seeing the advantages and disadvantages. Morrison also manages to undermine dichotomous thinking by suggesting that the issue cannot be viewed merely as an either/or proposition; factors such as race, class, heterosexualism, and even age impact our culture's perceptions of gender roles.

Gender is clearly a dominant theme in all of Toni Morrison's novels, and shapes her characters' conflicts. The unequal balance of power between men and women in her characters' social environment is predominant in all her works, and as this imbalance is internalized, it becomes part of the psychological conflicts her characters experience. Sexuality is an important arena on which these conflicts are played out, both as a result and as symbolic expression of social ills and inequities. In *Sula* (1973) the many different manifestations of sexuality serve as important means of characterization and help develop themes linked to gender. Morrison uses different aspects of sexuality to show the influence of the social environment on the characters' minds, emotions and actions. The way sexuality is portrayed in the different relationships between the characters in *Sula* suggests a clear and direct link to the gender roles in the society in which the novel is set. Morrison uses her characters' sexual behavior to illustrate how the unequal balance between the genders may create conflicts, dysfunctional relationships and damaged individuals. A sick sexuality may thus serve as a symbolic expression for the sick society in *Sula*.

Morrison's *Sula* explores the condition of women in a patriarchal society. It follows the lives of two girls, Nel and Sula, from childhood to adulthood. While Sula leaves her town to go to college, Nel chooses to stay and lead a conventional life. Although their different reaction to patriarchal norms leaves scars on their friendship, their strong bond draws them together at the end of the novel.

Most of the female characters are under the thumbs of the male characters. The women usually are seen living precariously according to the

whims and caprices of the men. Ruth Dead, Milkman's mother, is a veritable example of such a female. She is severely assaulted and abused by her husband. Macon Dead beats up his wife whenever he feels like. He even starves her of her conjugal rights for over twenty years. Ruth is in such a mortal dread of her husband, that, when she is preparing a meal for him, she is so jittery that the meal turns out badly. Ruth decides to breastfeed her son for a rather long time, despite his age as a solace. (Morrison 1993 : 15) writes, "It was a matter that concerned him [Macon] a good deal, for the giving of names in his family was always surrounded by what he believed to be monumental foolishness." No one mentioned to him the incident out of which the nickname grew because he was a difficult man to approach-a hard man, with a manner so cool it discouraged casual or spontaneous conversation. Apart from breastfeeding her son, Ruth decides to visit her father's grave fortnightly. Macon starts accusing her of infidelity but Milkman follows her and discovers his father's lies against his mother.

Milkman himself is another male character that exploits all the women in his life. He does not spare any of his female relatives at all - from his mother, sisters, aunt, to cousin/girlfriend, Hagar. Milkman disrespects his mother and takes his sisters for granted. He even steals from his aunt, Pilate, and abandons Hagar, which ultimately leads to her death. Magdalene called Lena, his eldest sister queries him: "And since when did you care whether Corinthians stood up or fell down? You've been laughing at us all your life. Corinthians. Mama. Me. Using us, ordering us, and judging us: how we cook your food; how we keep your house" (Morrison 1982: 215).

She lets Milkman in on the fact that they are aware that he is as wicked and difficult as their father. She goes on to berate him, Winston Napier (2007 : 451) "You are a sad, pitiful, stupid, selfish, hateful man. I hope your little hog's gut [penis] stands you in good stead, and that you take good care of it, because you don't have anything else"

The men in Macon Dead's family oppress and marginalize their women. Macon practically dehumanizes Ruth despite the fact that his wealth is actually Ruth's inheritance from her late father; Dr. Foster, the first black medical doctor in their town. This is also evident in Macon's treatment of his only sister, Pilate.

He sees Pilate as a failure, poverty stricken and an irrelevant person. He even goes to the extent of forbidding his wife and son from having anything to do with Pilate and her family. This is the same Pilate that gets so worried that her brother might end up without a son to continue the family lineage. She therefore decides to help her sister-in-law, Ruth, by preparing herbs that sedate Macon which enable him to sleep with his wife

and get her pregnant. Pilate's friendship with Ruth is an eloquent testimony of the concept of womanism.

The two daughters of Macon Dead the second, Magdalene called Lena and First Corinthians are treated like teenage girls even though they are well into their forties. Their father does not allow them freedom of movement. First Corinthians like Morrison's mother has her name blindly picked from the Bible. She is faceless and has no identity of her own. The two women are so suppressed and subjugated which leave them immature and vulnerable.

Right from childhood they are never allowed to interact with members of the black community, consequently as adults they find it extremely difficult to get boyfriends not to talk of husbands. Despite their apparent aging, no man is allowed to visit them. They are incapable of challenging their father, so they remain single till the end of the novel.

Gender plays an integral role in the narrative plot of *Sula*. The major thrust of the novel is on the two families of two little girls; Nel and Sula. Nel is "the product of a family that believes deeply in social conventions. Her home is a stable one, even though some may consider it rigid". Nel is uncertain of the conventional life her mother, Helene wants her to live. Sula's family is very different in that, her mother is considered wayward. Her mother, Hannah, and her grandmother, Eva, are not well spoken of in the Bottom community. Despite their differences, Sula and Nel become best of friends. After high school, Nel chooses to marry, and therefore settles into the conventional role of wife and mother. Sula follows a widely divergent path and lives a life of independence and total disregard for social conventions. Shortly after Nel's wedding, Sula leaves the Bottom for a period of ten years. She starts sleeping around with several men, even with white men; which is considered the worst thing a black can do.

Certainly, upon her return, the town regards Sula as the very personification of evil for her blatant disregard of social conventions. Their hatred for her rests upon her sleeping with white men, but is crystallized when Sula has an affair with Nel's husband, Jude, who subsequently abandons Nel. Sula's presence in the community provides the members of the community the opportunity to live harmoniously with one another. Nel, as a result of her husband's brazen infidelity with Sula, breaks off her relationship with her. They however achieve a half-hearted reconciliation just before Sula dies in 1940. *Sula* as a novel plays a lot on ambiguity. It questions and examines the terms 'good' and 'evil,' often demonstrating that the two are two sides of the same coin. The novel addresses the confusing mysteries of human

emotions and relationships, ultimately concluding that social conventions are inadequate as a foundation for living one's life. The narrative tries to make meaning of lives filled with conflicts over race, gender, and class.

In *Sula*, (1973) Morrison "uses" the maturation "story of Sula" and Nel as the core of a host of other stories, but it is the "chief" unification device for the novel and achieves "its own unity, again, through the clever" manipulation of the "themes of sex, "race, "and love. Morrison has undertaken a more "difficult task in *Sula* than in *Beloved* and she has definitely succeeded.

However, Lee correctly notes in her essay, "The Quest for Identity in the Novels of Toni Morrison" that "each" of Morrison's novels "embraces" the theme of the main "character's" search for identity. As Lee points out, "Sula is, like *The Bluest Eye*, "the story of a "failed" quest, a tale of "Sula's" inability to "create" for "herself a true" sense of self-worth. She "loses Nel, her "childhood" friend "in" whom Morrison "sees another "version of herself," through "her own "callous" and self-centered desire "for satisfaction" when she "takes Nel's husband" to "bed.

Later "she" loses her "lover Ajax, the "man" who sets her free "from her endless wandering" from man to man, ironically, because Ajax "senses that his own "freedom is in "danger from her "obsessive love. She dies, finally, unable "to fulfill her quest, unable "to find and hold onto a truly "black self. Thus, in the "final analysis, it becomes "clear that, although "Sula is a novel centered on black "people and black "culture, the power of the white "capitalists is still very much in evidence. Blackness is still being "used here to mean "absence or "negation: Black center is read "here as "no center."

In her first two novels; *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, (1973) Toni Morrison "seems to" reside within the critical sphere "inscribed by "Baker, B (2005 :13) term black (w)hole, for both novels describe a "search for wholeness in the shadowy "periphery of a "society dominated by "obvious white supremacy. And yet the "movement from "on the hem of life" to "no center" is, in "the context of Toni Morrison's own project to write "the black ideology, a "step" forward. Sula Peace's "quest for identity ends, like Pecola Breedlove's, in frustration. Both of "these "characters, like the town in which Sula grew up, have been ironically misnamed, for they know neither peace nor "love, only struggle and "alienation. They are not whole, but "fragile and fragmented. Although the narrator frequently "suggests affinities "between Sula and Shadrack, the ironic and "self-appointed shaman in the Bottom, who "establishes the National Suicide Day, Sula's "personality and destiny are "most fully revealed through "contrast and comparison with the "grandmother, Eva. Sula,

in "an" act unprecedented in "the" Bottom, has her formidable "grandmother "put away" in the Beechnut Hill "nursing home. This act "does" not go down "well" with "the Bottom community, because blacks are "known to take "good care of "their elderly ones. Sula dies forlorn, dejected, and "abandoned by the black community. Nel is the only black person at her funeral.

Theme of gender is interrelated in *The Bluest Eye*. Spurned and "rejected by a community" plagued by the virus "of self-hatred, Pecola is pushed to "the edge" of the town towards "marginality, both literally "and figuratively. Madness is "Pecola's fate there is no savoir "for her. Claudia observes towards "the end of "the novel. Sula's body was "even abandoned, It "was Nel who "finally called the "hospital, then the "mortuary, then the "spolice, who were the "ones to come. So "the white people "took over. They "came in a police "van and carried the "body down "the steps past the four pear trees "and into the van for all the world "as with Hannah. When the police "asked questions nobody "gave them any "information. It took "them hours to find "out the "dead woman's first name. The call was for "a Miss Peace "at Carpenter's Road. So "they left with that: a body, a "name and an "address. The "white people had to "wash her, dress her, prepare "her and finally "lower her. (172-173). Nobody ever suffered such a fate in the black Bottom community. Not even the most notorious prostitute in the community, China, was subjected to such an indignity in death. Therefore, Sula tries to stand up with the men, but is labeled a prostitute and gets consumed in the backlash.

The novel, *Sula* focuses "mainly on the "struggles of "womanhood "as faced by African-American "women in their own "communities. It also "portrays the intricacies "of "being female "as well as black. The double denigration of the black woman goes on simultaneously. The two girls; Nel and Sula that we encounter first in the novel as teenage girls are very much aware of the truism that they are neither white nor males. They, however, choose very divergent paths in arriving at self fulfillment. Morrison also "concerns herself with what it "means to be "good "and bad and how "these very concepts "are indefinable.

The final "scene between Nel and Sula "is both touching "and emotional "as both come to question "the other's opinion "and knowledge. Morrison "also introduces several "characters and "scenes "that challenge "the reader's "sense of good "and evil, especially the "scene in which Chicken Little "a young "boy who lives "in the Bottom" is climbing a tree with the help of Sula and then falls into the river and dies.

"Nel and "Sula do not know "what to do, and "neither of them "tells anyone "what has "happened. Definitions of "good and evil are "also challenged when "Eva tries to survive as a "woman on her own with

three"children.Eva makes"many sacrifices and is"able to sustain"her family; however, later on" in the novel she"kills her own son after"he returns from" war with an addiction"to drugs. Hannah, Sula's mother, is so promiscuous that she engages in sexual intercourse with any man. But she is however careful with the men she spends the night with. This way, she is more of a daytime lover. It so happens that on a particular"day, her daughter"Sula returns"from school and finds"her in bed"with"a man. Seeing"her step so easily"into the pantry and emerge"looking precisely"as she did"when she entered, only"happier, taught Sula that"sex was"pleasant and frequent, but "otherwise unremarkable. Outside"the house, where"children giggled about"underwear, the message was"different. So she watched"her mother's"face and the face "of the men when they"opened the pantry"door and made up her"own mind.

These perceptions are, however, also coloured by her individual initiation experience which occurs when she overhears Hannah talking to a friend about their daughters, Toni Morrison(1982 : 57). "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference...She only heard Hannah's words, and the pronouncement sent her flying up the stairs. In bewilderment, she stood at the window fingering the .curtain edge, aware of a sting in her eye. Nel's call floated up and into the window, pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" .

It is significant that Nel's call draws Sula into their most crucial shared initiation. Both girls have been prepared for it by their families, but they have been prepared to fail. This preparation for failure has, however, been social as well as familial. Their friendship has sustained them under some societal and familial pressures, and they know it.

As Morrison(ibid : 52) puts it, "Because each had discovered years before that they were"neither white nor male, "and all that freedom and"triumph was forbidden"to them, they had set"about creating"something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on. Daughters"of distant mothers and"incomprehensible fathers . . . they"found in each other's"eyes the intimacy they were"looking for".

One dramatic episode occurs when the girls are threatened by four white boys, newcomers in the community who assert themselves by tormenting black children on the way home from school. Sula, generally the leader in their comradeship, determines to end the problem, and she does so by slashing off the tip of her left forefinger before their eyes(Morrison 1982 : 54-55), "If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?". While, in a sense, she has solved the immediate problem, and while the girls have become "blood sisters," she has reacted with the violence which is her family pattern, and she has clearly indicated that

while she can act, she does so irresponsibly. Nel reacts by refusing to consider herself really as a part of the moment. The pattern of failure is set; just as they will never be free of family influence, they will be unable to cope with the pressures of society except by damaging themselves. Their ultimate joint initiation occurs on the river bank, immediately after Sula's rejection by her mother and very shortly after the blood rite. The experience confirms their unity, their sexuality, and their joint responsibility for what is about to happen; Morrison sets up the moment by a heavily symbolic description of play.

Their maturity is flawed because they successfully conceal their part in the death, and they will never have really successful unions with men because those unions are doomed to be marked with blood and pain. The complete failure of the initiation is not apparent at first; Nel marries, and on the wedding day, Sula leaves town to be gone for years, exploring the outside world. Nel's marriage, however, is limiting rather than defining. Morrison makes clear that Nel's lifelong search for conformity is the result of her mother's training and Nel's refusal to admit to herself that she has any responsibility for Chicken Little's death. The marriage provides her with respectability, a house to keep, children to rear, but it is doomed both through her own and her husband's lack of self-worth. The union is made because Nel is a tool for Jude's ego, his sense of maturity having been denied him by society.

So it was rage, rage and a determination to take on a man's rolethat made him press Nel about settling down. He needed some of his appetites filled, some posture of adulthood recognized, but mostly he wanted someone to care about his hurt, to care very deeply. Deep enough to hold him, deep enough to rock him, deep enough to ask, 'How you feel? You all right? Want some coffee?'

And if he were to be a man that someone could no longer be his mother. (Morrison : 1980 : 82). When Sula returns, several years later, the failure of their friendship is dramatized, for she engages in an affair with Jude, Nel's husband. The discovery of the affair ends their friendship; both women are to remain incomplete - and isolated - for life.

Sula undertakes the affair because she is a damaged personality, and as (Middleton 1997 :141) puts it, " As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life-ever since her mother's remarks sent her flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling of responsibility had been exorcised on the bank of a river with a closed place in the middle".The first experience taught her that there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow". (Morrison 1973 : 118-119)." . . . For that reason

she felt no "compulsion to" verify herself—to be "consistent with" herself"

Nel finds it difficult to cope with the affair between her husband and her best friend, Sula, because of her resolution, formed on that train south, to be hard, and never to be "soft" before the eyes of any man. This is the decision she reaches as a little girl, after she catches her mother smiling impishly at the white train conductor. After high school, Nel and Sula's paths diverge and do not intersect for another ten years. Nel stays in the Bottom and marries Jude Greene, a waiter at the local hotel and a member of the church choir. Sula leaves the Bottom and to college, and like her mother, has many affairs with men. "When she returns to the" Bottom, she and Nel immediately "pickpwherehey" left" off. However, Sula and Jude have an affair" and "Nel walks in" on them. This incident "ends the friendship between" Sula and Nel, as "well as the marriage of Nel and" Jude. After Jude leaves her for Sula, Nel raises her children alone, and "has no" communication with Sula "for three" years. The next "time they speak is when Sula is very" sick and is near death. The novel takes a "more explicitly" philosophical turn as the "two friends" have their final "conversation" about what it means to "be good or" bad and how one "knows the difference. Sula" dies soon after this "conversation and is buried" in the town cemetery. Most people in the "Bottom black community" rejoice at the "news of Sula's" death.

In the final scene of the novel, Nel visits Sula's grandmother, Eva, in an old people's nursing home. Eva is quite old and appears to be forgetful of the memories Nel seeks to retell. Saddened by the conversation with Eva, Nel walks home; she finds herself at the town cemetery and realizes that she misses Sula, her only friend. She is saddened because Eva takes her back to an event she will rather forget. Nel never reconciled with her inner self in the matter of the small boy, Chicken Little.

In *Sula* all the main characters are women. We follow the main character Sula from her early teens in the year 1921 to her death in 1940, from being a lonely little girl to someone who due to her promiscuous behavior has at the time of her death become the object of hatred and superstition in the Bottom (the black, segregated part of the town of Medallion where Sula lives). Sexuality proves to be an issue also in Sula's friendship to Nel, a friendship which Sula in the end ruins by sleeping with Nel's husband. The main character Sula is not, however, introduced by Morrison until 1922, after the character Shadrack is presented in 1919, and Sula's best friend Nel in 1920. It is evident that Morrison uses this way of opening to characterize the environment in which Sula grows up, and which has shaped Sula's character, personality and sexuality. Shadrack, a veteran from World War I, is the first character we get to know. He plays an important role in the novel both as the founder of National Suicide Day

and as a character associated with Sula: "In contrast to other male characters. Shadrack does participate in the community, albeit from a distance" (Morrison:, 66). Sexuality is an issue also in the portrayal of Shadrack: Blasted and permanently astonished by the events of 1917, he had returned to Medallion handsome but ravaged, and even the most fastidious people in the town sometimes caught themselves dreaming of what he must have been like a few years back before he 96 went off to war. A young man of twenty, his head full of nothing and his mouth recalling the taste of lipstick. . . (Sula 7;). Having Shadrack described in the first paragraph like this, suggests how his participation in the war has emasculated him. Having become permanently damaged by the war, Shadrack is just a faint shadow of his once beautiful self, and he is never to fully recover from his experiences. (During the course of the novel he only improves enough to feel lonely).

This is illustrated by his becoming an outsider and a freak in the community a monster walking around with his penis hanging out, shouting obscenities and scaring women and children. Shadrack's thwarted sexuality, his inability to act like a man, may be seen as a symbol of how a degenerate society has destroyed him. Morrison underlines how his character and very identity have become damaged when she describes how he, when in hospital, tries to pull off his hands and fling off his fingers, and how he is calmed when his hands are tied with a straitjacket. His fear of his own hands and fingers may symbolize his aversion to the killing he has participated in. Another passage portraying Shadrack's loss of himself is interesting: Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened, not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn't even know who or what he was. . . with no past, no language, no tribe. . . no soiled underwear and nothing, nothing to do. . . (12) 97 The passage attempts to explain how Shadrack has turned into a freak with no self and no one to relate to, which may foreshadow his life in the Bottom, as a man with no ties to anyone is perceived as a danger to society. Morrison applies a similar kind of portrayal of Sula as a grown woman later in the novel (115), and of son when introduced in the novel

So, after Sula's death, Eva, Sula's grandmother, forces the question: "What"did Eva mean by "you watched? How could she"help seeing it? She"was right"there". But Eva didn't say"see, she said watched. "I did not watch it. I just saw"it" But it was there anyway, as"it had always been, the old"feeling and the old"question. The good feeling"she had hadhen"Chicken's"hands"slipped.She"hadn't"wondered about that"in years. (Morrison 1973 :170). "Why didn't I feel bad"when it happened? How come"it felt so good to see him fall?" All"these years she had"been secretly proud of"her calm,controlled"behavior when"Sula was uncontrollable, her"compassion for Sula's frightened"and shamed eyes.Now"it seemed that"what she had thought"was maturity, serenity,

and "compassion was only the tranquility that follows a joyful stimulation. Just as the water closed peacefully over the turbulence of Chicken Little's body, so had contentment washed over her enjoyment

Therefore, separated by Nel's resolution to settle for respectable calm, both women live lives of desperate isolation, Sula becomes the scapegoat for the town's ills, and Nel lives a cold, severely respectable life as a put-upon woman. Symbolically, neither ever achieves a truly sustaining sexual union. When, finally, they do meet again, for Nel, meeting with the dying Sula is merely a part of her ..

Conclusion

Toni Morrison is one of the most noteworthy writers who shed light on the challenges her social class is experiencing. She gives us with many dark characters to the central worry of her two books, not to glorify her social class but rather to uncover the genuine conduct of her race. she was speaking from a doubly repressed but real tradition by several important black women writers who played so big role in the development of the American novel. They experience the ill effects of the same errors in the same social class. Along these lines, the representations of Pecola and her mom Paulin in data Bluest Eye and the representation of Sula and Nel in Sula are of incredible noteworthiness to feature the issues of the ladies in the cutting edge age. Such issues are of new kinds like (assaulting; subjugation; grotesqueness, excluded individuals, carelessness, an absence of education; disparity and reliance.). Morrison continues to examine the forces that mold gender and to suggest ways to negotiate them without giving in entirely to hegemonic expectations. Once again, Morrison plays with the notion of how closely aligned notions of race and gender are; the two cannot be separated. Morrison attempts to disguise the genetic markers of the women at the convent, so the readers are left wondering which characters are white, which are black. This attempt forces the readers to retreat from the race issue somewhat and focus instead on the gender concerns .

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