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## SISTERHOOD IN TONI MORRISON'S LOVE

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper analyzes female friendship in novel Love written by Toni Morrison, he dealt black diasporic women and examines the impact of class and gender on women's relationships. African woman writer Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature renowned literary wave higher than the wave of the boom can be said about her work. All the critics' application of critical theory parsing Morrison works in the race, gender and culture. This paper focuses on Morrison's novel Love, this little emphasis on the theme. Morrison works sisterhood topic ignored the main reason people are not well defined sisterhood, and with female same sex confuse. In order to eliminate this confusion and to highlight the significance of the sisterhood, In addition to the theoretical definition of the concept of sisterhood, the key analysis sisterhood five novels in Morrison's characterization. This paper consists of the theoretical definition of the sisterhood summary of the full epilogue. The introduction pointed out that the purpose and significance of the research on the theme of the love in Morrison sisterhood. The work focuses on the characterization of the sisterhood by comparing construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. Characterization of the sisterhood constructs of women history, not only against the oppression of male history, and highlights the meaning of love: self-love, love of others, love in groups. Sisterhood in the entire American female literary look at, so as to seek a literary tradition sisterhood, further prove and stressed the significance of Sisterhood.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Women's relationships, Female friendship, Female bonding, Sisterhood, Female Solidarity, Black Feminism,*

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of sisterhood and female bonding have been explored and challenged throughout the history of mainstream second-wave feminism in the U.S., and of Black feminism in particular. Several white feminist scholars and theoreticians have contested its meaning and defined the fundamental principles on which sisterhood should be based, such as collective female identity and common sexist oppression. However, Black female intellectuals, among them bell hooks, Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins, dismissed the white feminists' model of

universal sisterhood for being racist and simplistic, since it ignored the plurality of women's experiences and the complex nature of Black women's oppression. Instead, they offered an alternative vision of sisterhood based on self-knowledge and tolerance of each other's differences.

Toni Morrison herself, as a writer and active participant in Black feminist movement, incorporates the theme of sisterhood into her writing; her female characters bond with each other, complement and contradict one another, and their relationship often form the basic dynamics in the novels. As one of the

most prominent contemporary Black women authors, Toni Morrison realizes her own connection to a long literary and intellectual tradition of African American women and seeks to capture the richness of African American culture. Therefore, although the scope of her writing is wide, her themes, such as strife for freedom and independence, male/female relationships, and women's position in American society, always revolve around and are closely connected to African American communities.

The aim of this paper is to elaborate on two complex female relationships in Toni Morrison's novel *Love* (2003) in the context of the feminist debates concerning the nature of sisterhood. In this work, the sisterly bond of two main female protagonists, Christine and Heed in *Love*, is central to the story. In both cases, two African American women form a close relationship out of lack of parental support and peer acceptance; their friendships offer them a safety net and protection from the hostile environment and become the major factor in their identity-shaping processes. Ultimately, the novels reflect how the racist and sexist practices of both white and Black Americans, such as gender ideologies, stereotypical images of Black womanhood and internalized racism of African American communities might have detrimental effects on both self-definition and relationships among Black women.

The paper is separated into two parts: theoretical and critical. The theoretical part presents the development and the role of sisterhood in the context of first mainstream second-wave feminism and then Black feminism. In this chapter I use as sources the works of 1980s African American theoreticians such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Audre Lorde as well as the articles of several contemporary scholars. Firstly, I present the model of sisterhood promoted by the mainstream second-wave feminism. In order to connect several feminist groups, form a firm basis for political practice and successfully fight against sexism and male privilege, white feminist activists promoted the notion of universal sisterhood among all women stressing their shared experience of sexism.

*Love* is a story of two former friends, Heed and Christine Cosey, who share the same family name and the same household but live in bitter rivalry between each other, conspiring just to win what both yearn for—the Cosey estate. However, as the story unfolds, bits and pieces of memories reveal a family history, which is much more painful and complicated than it appears at the beginning; a history infused with vengeance and hopeless craving not that much for the

material possession as for love, affection and independence from the oppressive patriarchal power structures. The main protagonists in *Love* Heed and Christine are close childhood friends but become alienated as soon as Christine's Grandfather Bill Cosey, the most powerful Black man in a segregated African American neighbourhood, marries Heed. Unlike her other novel *Love* is written retrospectively, which highlights the salience of the past over present and gradually reveals a dark family history marked by class differences, morally questionable actions and racial as well as male-female power struggle. Bill Cosey, as the epitome of patriarchal supremacy, is the major disruptive power in Heed and Christine's relationship, whose presence becomes an oppressive and omnipresent force in the novel even after his death.

Sisterhood, apart from being a kinship-related term, can also designate a community of women with close bonds sharing economic and emotional resources and shaped by political, cultural, and social institutions. Historically, women bonded based on their material realities; female bonding was thus determined and often restrained by economic opportunities, political rights, and class privileges. For Black women in the U.S. sisterhood is deeply ingrained in their experience as means of transferring knowledge from one another and of sharing their experiences. It is clear that female relationships play an important role in Black women's lives both as a source of knowledge and as a platform for sharing their ordeal. Moreover, Black women's networks and "experiential" communities often extended their impact and were strategically organized with the aim for social change and reforms. Nevertheless, the concept of sisterhood as an official part of political agenda was not explicitly formulated before the advent of the second-wave feminism.

In other words, in order to lay firm foundations for a meaningful political practice and to appeal to women of all social strata in American society, white second-wave feminists aimed at establishing a collective female identity based on the notion of universal sexist oppression that afflicts all women equally regardless of their class or race. Distinguishing thus from the first wave feminists' reformism and individualism, second-wave liberationists claimed to be fighting collectively and radically for universal "women's liberation" from their patriarchal oppressors. Consequently, the attempt to bring together all women and establish collective female identity gave rise to the idea that sisterhood does not have to designate only close bonds among women; instead, it can be a useful tool for feminist agenda employed in political activism

In this way, sisterhood among women became a necessary ideological component in the struggle for dismantling male supremacy and for empowering all women regardless of their background. By promoting universal sisterhood, white feminists of the second wave attempted to minimize the differences among diverse white feminist groups and build cohesion among them; and indeed, they managed to mobilize them into joint action and form a common political agenda with the aim for social change. As a result of their collective efforts, the mainstream second-wave feminism succeeded in calling the attention to the exploitation of women globally and in bringing the inferior position of women in both political and private spheres of life into the forefront of political and ideological debates.

Heed and Christine used to be very close childhood friends, who bonded regardless of the differences in their social and family backgrounds although both grow up in the same African American community, Heed comes from a very poor neighbourhood while Christine is a rich Cosey heiress. However, their relationship turns antagonistic as soon as Christine's grandfather Bill Cosey decides to marry a still very young Heed despite a significant age and class difference. The speculations around why he chooses Heed to be his wife never really die out, the most probable one being his hope for numerous offspring, but it is not until much later in the novel that they are explained. Similarly, the reasons for the disintegration of Heed and Christine's friendship are uncovered gradually and can be traced back to the traumatic experiences of their childhood.

In order to demonstrate the salience of the past in Heed and Christine's lives, Morrison uses retrospective form of narration. In fact, *Love* treats the past in a similar way that, as an intrinsic and vivid part of the present, incessantly shaping the lives of both Heed and Christine and serving as an important factor in their decision-making processes. Moreover, the retrospective organization of the novel complicates the relationship between Heed and Christine that is initially presented simply as friends turned enemies. When Christine blames Heed for coming up with a "new way to rob her future just as she ripped off her past", she gives both the past and the future the same prominence in her life and points out that the past is far from being forgotten. By gradually revealing the incidents of the past, Morrison demonstrates their pertinence in the development of the characters and at the same time elucidates the complexity of Heed and Christine's relationship in the broader context of family and social structures.

The novel takes place he is long deceased but he remains an omnipresent power in the novel, materialized in the gigantic portrait hanging on the wall in the Cosey's mansion. Even the chapter headings Portrait, Friend, Stranger, Benefactor, Lover, Husband, Guardian, Father, Phantom refer to his multiple roles in the story. In many ways, the hierarchical organisation of the Cosey family reflects the white middle-class hegemony, which heavily relies on the father as the head and the absolute authority in the family. But as the professional and personal spheres of Cosey's life conflate, the asymmetrical distribution of power within the family emphasizes its servant-like quality and the father-dominant model of the family proves to be detrimental to the women in the novel. Indeed, the fight "for the prince's smile" as well as their falsely placed idolatry of Bill Cosey ruins all female relationships and irreversibly marks the lives of both Heed and Christine.

The women themselves are from the very beginning of the novel portrayed as a destructive power. Morrison intensifies the image of Bill Cosey as a great man who can only blame women for the decline of his hotel empire. Moreover, the relationship between Heed and Christine, as represented in the first chapters, supports the negative depiction of female characters. The two women have been occupying the same family house for more than two decades and have lived as implacable enemies all that time. Christine calls Heed "the meanest thing on the coast" (*love*. 24) and "a rabid beach rat" (*love* 99) and remembers how she and Heed used to engage in fights and quarrels that were "as much rite as fight", until they "moved into acid silence" since neither one could leave. Apparently, Heed and Christine coexist in a vicious circle of revenge that they are not able to break even after two decades under the same roof. Unlike their relationship with the male head of the family, the relationship between the two main female characters seems to be irreversibly damaged.

Heed and Christine are two African American women who are approximately the same age and occupy the same living space but they are exact opposites in many ways. Firstly, Christine, born to a wealthy and influential family, was well-educated in a private school, while Heed comes from one of the poorest families in the neighbourhood and has no schooling whatsoever remaining semiliterate her whole life. Secondly, Christine is physically well-build and strong even in her sixties while Heed is fragile and thin and barely able to move and take care of herself. Finally, although they end up as members of the same family, their life paths have been very different: Heed

is married to Bill Cosey her whole life and the marriage elevates her social status; Christine gets married and divorced very young and spends her life drifting from one relationship into another, often with married men, until she eventually slides “from spoiled girl child into tarnished homelessness” (*Love* 87).

Therefore, the differences in family background and social class, which were not an obstacle for their childhood bond, have become the very things that divide them after the marriage. Indeed, when Bill Cosey marries Heed, she suddenly becomes a member of a rich and influential family that is strikingly different from hers in terms of both lifestyle and material realities. This fact enrages Christine and her mother May and Heed’s background and upbringing become a site for dispute and allegations.

Heed and Christine start living together in the 1970s, long after both May and Bill Cosey are dead; the house becomes a site not only for intense animosity but also for the reversal in their position within the household hierarchy. Heed is the owner of the house but cannot manage it because of her deteriorating health condition, so when Christine shows up in 1974, broke and without a place to stay, she unwillingly lets her in and has her run the household. Christine therefore takes on a role of a housekeeper, “collecting soiled clothes, washing out the tub, pulling hairs from the drain”, which turns her life into a living hell (*Love* 95).

Interestingly, the women fulfil the role that stands in opposition to their social background and education: “So the one who had attended private school kept house while the one who could barely read ruled it” (*Love* 86). But although their place in the house forms a division between them, and although they perceive one another as having nothing in common, their living conditions are not so fundamentally different: Christine is forced to take care of the woman she despises and Heed, in turn, is dependent on Christine, despising her as much. Moreover, neither of them can leave and even within the community, which greatly admired Bill Cosey, Heed and Christine as the last of the Coseys alive, are outcasts—nobody in the neighbourhood likes them or communicates with them, which only intensifies their isolation and mutual dependence. Christine’s degradation and Heed’s helplessness demonstrate the pathological perversity of the place as well as the decay of the Cosey clan—once a symbol of power and wealth, now a prison for its remaining members.

To summarize, *Love* starts by introducing Heed and Christine as two implacable enemies, while ending with a picture of their insurmountable love for each

other. This contrast underlines the ultimate tragedy of the novel—the destruction of sisterly love between Heed and Christine—caused by their own families, which are traditionally sites of comfort and protection against racism for Black women. The main initiator of the dismantling of their friendship is Bill Cosey, a powerful African American entrepreneur, who internalizes the controlling images of Western gender ideology and imposes his will and sexist patriarchal presence on the female members of his household. Therefore, Heed and Christine are forced to enter the adulthood prematurely, which results into their incapability of ever fully overcoming their childhood traumas and developing their personalities. Finally, the lack of honesty between them, stemming from their feeling of shame and conviction of their own culpability in sexualizing their bodies, prevents them from re-establishing their bond.

## CONCLUSION

Black feminism in the U.S. contributed significantly to the analysis of both the mechanisms of women’s oppression and the notion of sisterhood. The universal sisterhood proposed by white feminists, laid firm foundations for liberating all women regardless of their race and class, and for fighting against all forms of oppressive social structures in the U.S., such as racism, sexism and classism. The story of the main female protagonists in Morrison’s novel *Love* reflect many struggles of African American women in the racist and sexist American society—Western gender ideologies, stereotypical images of Black womanhood, internalized racism and sexism, and confinement of their own communities.

To conclude, Morrison’s novels *Love* depict Black female characters trapped within the white patriarchal power structures that impose on them various racial and gender stereotypes and depriving them of job and educational opportunities, which might stimulate their personal development. Abandoned or misused by both Black and white men and ignored or unsupported by their own families and communities, these women look for support in sisterly bonds with one another. Heed and Christine yearn for the sense of belonging that they cannot find in the corruptive environment of the Cosey family; and all of them crave for support found in the female friendships that they cannot restore. The message that seems to emerge from Morrison’s writing is that even the most powerful sisterly bonds can be destroyed by the mechanisms of oppression if they are not sustained by their families and communities. Thus, Morrison seems to be saying that to eliminate oppression and to ensure equal opportunity for women of all colours the principles of

female solidarity, such as tolerance and acceptance, need to be extended to all types of interpersonal and cultural relations.

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