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Bakalářská práce

Téma lásky v románech *Sula* a *Beloved* od Toni Morrison

The Theme of Love in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Beloved*

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Declaration:

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

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1. Introduction

Toni Morrison was born in 1931 as Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. She studied at Howard University and later at Cornell. She worked as an English teacher, but in 1965 she became a senior editor at the Random House. Thanks to her, many African American works were published. As Henry Louis Gates observes, as a writer, Morrison was influenced by the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and by William Faulkner. Morrison published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970. *Sula* was published in 1974, followed by *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), and *Beloved* in 1987. In 1993, Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, becoming the first African American woman to win the prize.¹ Morrison continues to publish until the present day; her most recent works include *Paradise*, *Love*, and *A Mercy*.

When putting Morrison's work into a wider context, we have to consider the difficulties of African American self-expression in literature. According to Barbara Christian, in the 1970s and 1980s, the time Morrison published most of her novels, African American women writers undertook an exploration of their history and community. They were finally able to express what the previous generations were not, as they were permitted to express themselves in limited ways, due to racism and sexism. Starting with Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953), we can observe a certain shift in the fiction of Afro-American women writers, who began to put more emphasis on the process of self-definition. By the mid-seventies, as Christian further claims, writers like Paule Marshall, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, and Gayl Jones had defined their cultural context as a distinctively Afro-American one, and they were able to point out to the problems of racism and sexism in black communities. Moreover, from that time on, Afro-American women writers began to focus on the problems of black women in the role of a mother and daughter, as Toni Morrison in *Sula*, and Alice Walker in

¹ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Preface to *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah ed. (New York: Amistad, 1993) 13.

Meridian. They also challenged the prevailing definition of women in relation to motherhood and sexuality.²

As Morrison explains in the foreword to *Beloved*, at the time she started working on the novel, she had just left her job at the publishing house. She describes the atmosphere of the 1980s as a time when: “the debate was still roiling: equal pay, equal treatment, access to professions, schools...and choice without stigma. To marry or not. To have children or not.”³ These thoughts led her back to slavery when marriage for African Americans was impossible or illegal, and having children was out of question.⁴ As Shane White claims, Morrison was able to present us with one of the best treatments of slavery in terms of the immorality of slavery.⁵ Another dominant theme in Morrison’s work beside slavery, as the author herself claims, is love:

Beauty, love...Actually, I think, all the time that I write, I’m writing about love or its absence. Although I don’t start that way...I still write about the same thing, which is how people relate to one another and miss it or hang on to it...or are tenacious about love.⁶

However, Toni Morrison does not explore conventional love in her works, but quite the contrary. She re-defines the notion of love and takes, as Deborah McDowell points out, a harsher, tougher, less romantic view of love. She portrays scenes and situations of love gone badly wrong, which are often bizarre and beyond belief. Her intention is not to write a love story in conventional terms. Love in her books is also often accompanied by violence. Analyzing many different kinds of love such as family love, romantic love, self-love, and friendship, Morrison shows how love is challenged by obsession, possessiveness, slavery, or

² Barbara Christian, “Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women’s Fiction” in Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers ed., *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 233-242.

³ Toni Morrison, Foreword in *Beloved* (London: Vintage Books, 1997) 5.

⁴ Foreword in *Beloved*, 4-6.

⁵ Shane White, “Representing Slavery: A Roundtable Discussion,” *Common Place*, Vol.1, No. 4. July 2001: 5.

⁶ Toni Morrison in Jane S. Bakerman, “Failures of Love: Female Initiation in the Novels of Toni Morrison,” *American Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 4. Jan. 1981: 1.

conventions.⁷ She suggests that these different types influence one another and illustrates that conflicts can be created by either the lack or excess of love.

Both in *Sula* and *Beloved*, extraordinary love relationships can be found. We read of a motherly love claiming to be so strong that it can justify murder, a friendship between two women so powerful that its ignorance ruins their lives, a self-love so weak it prevents the characters from finding fulfillment in other kinds of love and, contrary to this, self-love so strong that the characters are not able to connect with other people. In both *Sula* and *Beloved*, love often faces many challenges including the past, slavery, society and conventions, or possessiveness.

I will discuss the theme of mother love, self-love, and romantic love in *Beloved*, and mother love, romantic love, and friendship in *Sula*. It is necessary to point out that it is not possible to make a clear cut between those forms of love, as they overlap continually and influence one another greatly. We will see that the various types of love or their absence can either cooperate or create conflicts.

It could also be argued that other Morrison's novels could have been discussed. However, there are certain connections and common features that justify my choice. Apart from the common types of love explored in the books, with the exception of friendship, there are other similar features that connect both the novels. The relationship between mothers and daughters is the decisive relationship. Moreover, this relationship is challenged by some external factors contributing to its dysfunction, namely the institution of slavery, the past, and history in *Beloved*, and poverty and conventions in *Sula*, and possessiveness in both. Furthermore, this relationship is closely connected to the relationship with one's own self.

The theme of the first chapter thus will be relationships between mothers and daughters in *Sula* and *Beloved*, respectively. We will see how important motherly love is and how it shapes the characters' lives. Moreover, I will demonstrate that there are some aspects which affect this relationship and also shape the characters' personalities and other relationships. In *Beloved*, we will see that slavery made motherhood impossible, whereas in *Sula* conventions

⁷ Deborah E. McDowell, "Philosophy of the Heart," *Woman's Review of Books* 21, No. 3. Dec. 2003, 8-9.

and poverty are the decisive forces. Furthermore, I will argue that the mother-daughter relationships influence immensely other love-relationships, especially self-love.

Self-love will be dealt with in the following chapter. However, only *Beloved* will be analyzed in this chapter. Self-love in *Sula* will not be treated separately, as the theme will be explored by chapters on other types of love. As there are more characters to be discussed in *Beloved*, a separate chapter for self-love is needed. I will argue that slavery has a great impact on the characters' personalities and their self-worth, and that they will have to reconcile with the past and redefine their selves. They all will need the help from other characters, other kinds of love, as well as the help of the community in their search for a new self.

Friendship in *Sula* is the focus of the next chapter. The importance of this special type of love in the protagonists' lives will be pointed to, as well as the destructive powers of the ignorance of it. Finally, romantic love in both novels will be discussed in the last chapter. I will show that it is immensely important for the characters in *Beloved*, who need love to be able to gain strength for finding their selves. In *Sula*, two different attitudes will be discussed, closely connected to approaches to conventions, representing two extremes which both prove dysfunctional.

2. Mother-daughter love

The mother-daughter relationships explored in *Sula* and *Beloved* are extremely complicated and often controversial. Moreover, they frequently define the development of the main characters' personalities. In *Sula*, Morrison portrays two different families with different attitudes, challenged by different issues. In the case of the Wright women, Morrison questions conventionalism and a traditional middle-class definition of women's goodness. The Peace women's mothering is initially challenged by poverty and later by their ability to develop a sense of self and understand their own needs, and ignore conventions. In *Beloved*, Morrison explores the impact of slavery on individuals, their ability to develop and claim a self, and the consequences of trying to define a self through maternal bonds. She shows how the bonds were crippled by the institution of slavery and that the slaves were deprived of their selves, choosing death rather than living in slavery.

2.1 Mother love in *Sula*

Sula Peace and Nel Wright are both daughters of "distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers."⁸ Nel is brought up in strictness; Sula's home, on the contrary, is a place full of noise and strangers, where no rules seem to exist. The two families – the Wright women and the Peace women – represent the two diverse attitudes. Even though they are completely different, they both create conflicts in other types of love.

2.1.1 The Wright women are characterized by their unyielding adherence to social conventions and their definition of goodness. Moreover, as Diane Gillespie and Missy D. Kubitschek claim in their essay, the Wright women take on responsibility for others and they venerate the feminine conventions of self-sacrifice and martyrdom.⁹ The mothers in the novels are often emotionally distant. However, Helene Wright's mother is also distant physically. Helene, Nel's mother, was brought up by her grandmother to avoid the wild life of her Creole prostitute mother. Helene is encouraged to religious strictness and to live according to middle class conventions. She finds satisfaction in her married life, becoming

⁸ Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Plume, 1982) 52.

⁹ Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek, "Who Cares? Women-Centered Psychology in *Sula*," *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 24, No. 1. Spring 1990:30.

one of the respected women in Medallion. She joins the most conservative church and as an active member, she performs charity, for that, according to her, makes one a good person. However, as Gillespie and Kubitschek point out, her many social concerns are not genuine. Her only unconscious aim is to control.¹⁰ Helene “loved her house and enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband.”¹¹ Nel is thus brought up in the same way – according to the social conventions and the traditional feminine goodness.

Nel obeys her mother and behaves properly until they visit Helene’s mother. On their way to New Orleans, Nel witnesses her mother’s humiliation and sees her mother melt in front of a white conductor. She realizes that: “If this tall, proud woman, this woman who was very particular about her friends, who slipped into church with unequaled elegance, who could quell a roustabout with a look, if *she* were really custard, then there was a chance that Nel was too.”¹² Nel is determined after this incident to be always on guard, to never let anyone “turn her into jelly,”¹³ and to be different. She even finds a friend, in spite of her mother’s disagreement, with whom she can escape the “oppressive neatness of her home.”¹⁴

However, Nel becomes her mother’s daughter, even though she despises her mother’s conventional attitudes, her emotional dryness, and distance. As Gillespie and Kubitschek explain, Nel learns from her mother middle-class self-righteous immersion in others. She embodies limitations and paradoxes of this immersion, and her notion of goodness freely offered to others becomes a bargain.¹⁵ Nel devotes her life to her husband Jude, her children, and the commitment to be a good person who cares about the others. However, this leads to destruction of not only her life, but of others’ lives as well. Nel’s marriage itself is actually another product of her need to help others and her goodness to others. Nel fulfills her future husband’s need to be cared for, as it complements her need to be good to other people and care about their needs. Knowing nothing else from her mother, Nel focuses on somebody else’s needs again when her marriage collapses. Nel denies herself her own needs and thus is

¹⁰ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 30.

¹¹ Sula, 18.

¹² Sula, 22.

¹³ Sula, 22.

¹⁴ Sula, 29.

¹⁵ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 31.

not able to cultivate her own self. As Gillespie and Kubitschek suggest, the embodiment of her submerged needs is the grey ball Nel sees hanging above her when her husband leaves.¹⁶ Her mother love is an escape from the painful reality. She would rather think constantly about her children because “it was so nice to think about their scary dreams and not about the ball of fur.”¹⁷ However, Nel knows when her husband leaves that her children are “everything she would ever know of love.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, this love changes over the years: “It was a love that, like a pan of syrup kept too long on the stove, had cooked out, leaving only its odor and hard, sweet sludge, impossible to scrape off.”¹⁹

The Wright women seem to be responsible and caring mothers. However, especially Helene’s emotional distance, caused by the unquestioning obedience to social conventions, her social middle-class masks of perfection, and the constant need to manipulate people and show her goodness have a terrible impact on her daughter.

2.1.2 Sula Peace and her family stand in opposition to the Wright family. The Peace women are unconventional and, perhaps because there is no man in the house, they are independent and proud. However, their relationships are even more complicated, challenged by poverty which creates the emotional distance and their unconventional actions and love. As a consequence, they can develop a strong sense of self.

Eva Peace, Sula’s grandmother, is probably the most controversial character in the novel as far as mother love is concerned. Left by her husband with three little children, she knew that “the children needed her and she needed money, and needed to get on with her life.”²⁰ We can already see the crucial difference between the Peace and Wright women. Eva understands, as a mother, that her children need her. However, she acknowledges she needs to get on with her life as well. Thus, even though she is concerned about her children, she also recognizes her own needs, in contrast to Helene and Nel. Moreover, her situation is challenged and complicated by poverty, for “the demands of feeding her three children were so acute she had to postpone her anger for two years until she had both the time and the

¹⁶ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 32.

¹⁷ Sula, 109.

¹⁸ Sula, 165.

¹⁹ Sula, 165.

²⁰ Sula, 32.

energy for it. She was confused and desperately hungry.”²¹ The financially difficult situation has a great impact on the relationship with her children.

Even though the focus of the chapter – same as Morrison’s novel – is mother-daughter love, one mother-son relationship cannot be omitted. When Eva’s baby son Plum stops having bowel movements, Eva saves his life when she shoves “the last bit of food...up his ass. Softening the insertion with the dab of lard, she probed with her middle finger to loosen his bowel.”²² Right after this episode she leaves her children with a neighbor and vanishes for eighteen months. She comes back with a new pocketbook and only one leg and starts building a house. Even though it is not clear what Eva had done, it is clear she sacrificed her leg for her children, as if she knew she would not be able to bring up her children or get on with her life without that money.

Years later, when Plum comes back from war as a drug addict, it is an unbearable sight for Eva to see her beloved child slowly killing himself. One night, she decides to put an end to this suffering. In his room, she gathers Plum into her arms and rocking him like a baby again, she says goodbye to him. Despite the extreme pain it causes her, lifting “her tongue to the edge of her lip to stop the tears from running into her mouth,”²³ she feels this is the only possible solution. She soaks Plum with kerosene, sets him on fire, and leaves the room. Moments later, when her daughter Hannah tells her that Plum is on fire, they have only to look in each other’s eyes to understand. The book does not judge Eva for this undoubtedly controversial act. We can argue that Eva had no right to end her son’s life, no matter how miserable it was. The point, however, is not to question the rightness of her deed, but to try to understand the reason for it.

I have already noted that the poverty Eva has to struggle with influences her relationships with her children. As Gillespie and Kubitschek point out, Eva has to distance herself from them in order to be able to deal practically with the threat of poverty. She leaves her children for eighteen months and she distances herself emotionally from them as well.²⁴

²¹ Sula, 32.

²² Sula, 34.

²³ Sula, 47.

²⁴ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 35.

Probably this emotional distance makes Hannah ask the question: “Mamma, did you ever love us?”²⁵ Eva is offended by the question, even though she admits she did not love them the way Hannah has in mind. “I was talking about something else. Like. Like. Playin’ with us. Did you ever, you know, play with us?”²⁶ However, for Eva, the fact that Hannah’s eyes are not “two holes full of maggots”²⁷ is enough, as there “wasn’t nobody playing in 1895...I stayed alive for you...What would I look like leapin’ ‘round that old room playin’ with youngins with three beets to my name?”²⁸ Eva is convinced that her staying alive for them, and her ability to keep them alive as well, was a sufficient badge of love, and that she actually loved them enough, even though she did not play “rang-around-the-rosie” with them.

No matter how solid Hannah finds Eva’s arguments, she still insists on explaining Plum’s death. Eva claims Plum turned into a child again “being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time,” and trying to get back into her womb. “I ain’t got the room no more in my womb...I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb,”²⁹ she says. What Eva refuses is to mother her adult child again. She never denied that bringing up her children all by herself was difficult, and she is not capable of going through it again. Gillespie and Kubitschek mention other theories about Plum’s attempt to crawl back into Eva’s womb, some of which consider sexual overtones. However, I agree with them that it rather confirms Eva’s recognition of her own needs which, as she makes clear, must be primary. Eva maintains a self in relationships with others and takes responsibility for her choices. Moreover, her consideration of her own needs as well as Plum’s indicates that at this point her connections are authentic, based on a solid self rather than the need to serve, in contrast to Helene and Nel.³⁰

Moreover, it is important that Eva does not consider Plum a man with a strong personality anymore, claiming: “I done everything to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn’t...so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all

²⁵ Sula, 67.

²⁶ Sula, 68.

²⁷ Sula, 68.

²⁸ Sula, 69.

²⁹ Sula, 71.

³⁰ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 37-38.

scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man.”³¹ This could explain why she is willing to sacrifice her life for her daughter Hannah. When Hannah’s dress catches accidentally on fire, Eva knows there is time for nothing else than to get there and cover her daughter’s body with her own. She smashes the windowpane and throws herself out of the window. Eva does not hesitate a single second to help her daughter, even though she cannot save Hannah’s life. While Plum is not “worth” saving anymore, as he has ruined his life, Hannah is still a strong, independent, active woman with a strong self worth saving.

Eva’s attitudes and relationships with her children were greatly influenced by the difficult situation in which she had to take care of them. She tries to do her best to feed them and keep them alive, and at the same time, not to forget her own needs. The poverty she has to struggle with and the actions she takes together with her unconventionality cause an emotional distance between her and her children, and she is not able to interact and communicate with them properly, as Gillespie and Kubitschek point out.³²

Eva’s daughter and granddaughter are much like her in many respects. Hannah inherits Eva’s unconventionality as well as the shortcomings of her upbringing. The emotional distance between the mother and the daughter makes Hannah uncertain about her mother’s feelings. Hannah follows her mother’s footsteps, pursuing her own interests, even though she comes home to take care of her mother when her husband dies. Nevertheless, she is also unable to connect and communicate with her daughter Sula. Moreover, while Hannah is uncertain about her mother’s feelings, Sula is painfully certain about Hannah’s. Sula overhears her mother’s conversation with her friends. When they discuss their feelings towards their children, Hannah says: “Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula. I just don’t like her. That’s the difference.”³³ Hannah distinguishes between unconditional loving and liking someone. This statement underscores the unconventionality of the Peace women as well as their ability to recognize and act upon their needs. As Gillespie and Kubitschek assert, it seems that due to the emotional distance between the mothers and daughters, the women are

³¹ Sula, 72.

³² Gillespie and Kubitschek, 39.

³³ Sula, 57.

able to develop a strong sense of self.³⁴ Thus, Hannah is capable of distinguishing between the feelings society dictates to her and those she really feels.

Hannah distances herself from Sula, making herself unavailable, which teaches Sula that “there is no other that you could count on.” Right after that, she accidentally kills a boy in a game, which teaches her “there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow.”³⁵ As Carolyn Jones points out, Sula has no one, not even herself, to depend on and she patterns her life on being unsupported and unconventional. She devotes her life to reclaiming the self her mother and the accident took away,³⁶ as we will see later.

This distance between Sula and her mother could be seen on Sula’s controversial reaction to her mother’s death. When Hannah catches on fire and Eva tries to save her, Eva sees Sula standing on the porch, looking at her mother burn, supposedly paralyzed. However, Eva is convinced that Sula watched not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested. Gillespie and Kubitschek assert that Sula’s reaction is a sign of her refusal of the family commitment Hannah makes when she comes back to Eva’s house to take care of her. Later, Sula also puts Eva into a nursing home for the same reason.³⁷ Nevertheless, Sula can partly escape the emotional vacuum of her family with her friend Nel (as I illustrate in the following chapter).

2.2. Mother love in *Beloved*

Mother love in *Beloved* is as complicated as in *Sula*, if not more. As in *Sula*, the relationships are made impossible by an external factor, which in this case is slavery. However, this problem is to be found on more levels than in *Sula*. In *Sula*, only Eva had to challenge this factor, while in *Beloved* this factor has a terrible affect on whole generations. Moreover, Sethe defines her self through her children, considering them her best self. Morrison argues that, as a consequence of slavery, the mother-daughter relationships do not function properly. As Stephanie Demetrakopoulos points out, the institution of slavery denies

³⁴ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 39.

³⁵ *Sula*, 118-119.

³⁶ Carolyn M. Jones, “*Sula and Beloved: Images of Cain in the Novels of Toni Morrison*,” *African American Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4. Winter 1993: 621-622.

³⁷ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 39.

Sethe her mothering and destroys the natural cycles of maternal bonding.³⁸ Moreover, *Beloved* is complicated by the multiple meanings *Beloved* has.

Sethe loves her children more than anything in the world, they are “her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her that was clean.”³⁹ She wants to push her mother love beyond the limits. However, slavery denies Sethe from developing a self of her own and, as Jones claims, Sethe is able to recognize her self only in the role of a mother,⁴⁰ which is nevertheless destroyed by slavery as well. According to Barbara Schapiro, the mother, the child’s first vital other, is made unreliable or unavailable by the slave system which either separates her or depletes her so that she has no self with which to confer recognition.⁴¹ This denial of a mother to a child can be traced back to Sethe’s mother. Sethe barely knew her mother, “who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child...as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field.”⁴² Sethe had to wait patiently to even see her mother’s face: “waited for this particular back to gain the row’s end and stand. What she saw was a cloth hat as opposed to a straw one, singularity enough in that world of cooing women each of whom was called Ma’am.”⁴³ However, she remembers almost nothing now. She “saw her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo...she didn’t even sleep in the same cabin.”⁴⁴

Sethe is determined to protect her children from the horrors she went through when she was not given a chance to love her mother and be loved back, and was humiliated and turned into an object as a slave. Thus, when her former owner comes to take her and the children back, she kills her daughter because “if I hadn’t killed her she would have died and that was something I could not bear to happen to her.”⁴⁵ As Schapiro points out, the physical death is more acceptable for Sethe than the humiliation and the horrors of slavery as it leads to the death of a self, a psychic death, which involves the denial of one’s existence as a

³⁸ Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, “Maternal Bonds as Devourers of Woman’s Individualism in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *African American Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1. 1992: 52.

³⁹ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage Books, 1997) 296.

⁴⁰ Jones, 616.

⁴¹ Barbara Schapiro, “The Bonds of Love and The Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 32, No. 2. Summer 1991: 194.

⁴² *Beloved*, 37.

⁴³ *Beloved*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Beloved*, 72.

⁴⁵ *Beloved*, 136.

human.⁴⁶ After the murder, Sethe slowly distances herself from the community, her two sons run away. She is left only with her younger daughter Denver, whom she overprotects, keeping the past from her. When another former slave from the Sweet Home plantation, Paul D, comes to her house, he is the one to point out the overprotection, thinking it is “Risky...very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love.”⁴⁷ Paul D’s coming is of great significance, as a new stage of life in 124 begins. Most importantly, Paul D chases away a ghost that haunts the house, supposedly the ghost of the murdered baby.

There are numerous interpretations of the girl who comes to 124 and calls herself Beloved.⁴⁸ However, I think they cannot be separated, as they cooperate rather than exclude each other. Denver, and later also Sethe, believe that she is the murdered baby coming back in flesh. Moreover, there is also a symbolic interpretation, arising from her knowledge, speech, and behavior which supports the idea that she also represents the ability to remember, along with the reconciliation with the past. Moreover, she is also the embodiment of Sethe’s mother and all other beloved people lost during the Middle Passage and slavery.

According to Deborah Horvitz, one of the reasons Beloved returns is to pass judgment on Sethe.⁴⁹ Even though Sethe is convinced she did a good thing when she killed her child, as it “came from true love,”⁵⁰ she cannot get rid of the terrible memory, the pain, and the sense of guilt, and she cannot stop dwelling on the past. Ashraf Rushdy suggests that Beloved is the incarnated memory of Sethe’s guilt and the critique of the slave history.⁵¹ Sethe assumes from Beloved’s return that Beloved forgives her and she does not have to remember or explain anything, because Beloved understands everything. Beloved demands Sethe’s attention, she looks at her all the time, and her hunger for Sethe’s attention becomes dangerous. “Sethe played all the harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches,

⁴⁶ Schapiro, 195.

⁴⁷ Beloved, 54.

⁴⁸ “Beloved” was an inscription on the murdered baby’s tombstone.

⁴⁹ Deborah Horvitz, “Nameless Ghost: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*,” *Studies in American Fiction*, Vol. 17, No. 2. Autumn 1989: 161.

⁵⁰ Beloved, 296.

⁵¹ Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, “Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *American Literature*, Vol. 64, No. 3. Sept. 1992: 578.

the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk. If the hen had only two eggs, she got both. It was as though her mother had lost her mind.”⁵² Later, the games turn into arguments and Beloved blames Sethe for leaving her behind, never smiling at her.

At this point, Denver realizes one of the reasons for Beloved’s return. Once Sethe starts to explain and memories about her mother blossom, putting it into more general history, Denver understands, as Rushdy points out, her mother’s deed might not be so heinous as she thought.⁵³ Thus, Beloved helps Denver to understand the murder and the reason for it and later reconcile with it and go on living.

However, Beloved represents much more than just the ghost of the killed daughter. What supports this idea are questions Beloved asks Sethe and the things she claims she saw and experienced on the “other side.” One of the first things Beloved asks Sethe is about Sethe’s mother: “‘Your woman she never fix up your hair?’ ... ‘My woman, you mean my mother? If she did I do not remember.’”⁵⁴ However, as soon as Beloved mentions her mother, Sethe suddenly remembers her mother’s language. As Horvitz asserts, Beloved helps Sethe unfold her memory. Horvitz goes on to explain that:

Although Sethe had forgotten the words of her mother’s language, they continue to exist inside her as feelings and images that repeatedly emerge as a code that she relies on without realizing it. This code holds animated, vital memories, such as the one of the mother dancing juba, as well as the most painful fact of Sethe’ life: her mother’s absence.⁵⁵

Here, Beloved represents the need to remember things. Sethe realizes that there is a connection between her and her mother but, as Horvitz claims, she buried memories about her mother not only because they were vague, but because they were painful. To acknowledge there is a connection between her and her mother even though her mother is dead means to

⁵² Beloved, 282.

⁵³ Rushdy, 583.

⁵⁴ Beloved, 72.

⁵⁵ Horvitz, 159.

acknowledge the abandonment and absence as well.⁵⁶ Interestingly, Sethe remembers her mother “dancing an antelope,” realizing she thought of the unborn Denver as an antelope, which was kicking in her belly whenever she stopped walking. Thus, as Horvitz says, the image of the mother and unborn Denver become one and as Sethe bears the next generation in her matrilineal line, she keeps her mother’s African antelope dancing alive.⁵⁷

Moreover, Sethe also remembers her mother killed all her other children she had with white men and there is another woman Sethe knows who is hinted also to have killed her child. Rushdy suggests *Beloved* forces Sethe to acknowledge her act and take responsibility for it while also recognizing the reason for the act within a larger historical framework.⁵⁸ Thus, *Beloved* forces Sethe to come to terms with her act.

When *Beloved* turns mean and starts to blame Sethe for leaving her behind, it seem as if it was Sethe talking to her mother, rather than *Beloved* to Sethe. Sethe’s mother never intended to take Sethe with her, even though she was the only child she named and did not kill. However, *Beloved* also talks about a “woman with the face I want” and a woman whose face she lost under water, and she says: “She went there. They did not push her. She went there. She was getting ready to smile at me and when she saw the dead people pushed into the sea she went also and left me there with no face or hers.”⁵⁹ Horvitz suggests that this is not Sethe’s mother anymore but rather Sethe’s grandmother, who probably was with Sethe’s mother on the ship, undergoing the Middle Passage with her. Sethe’s grandmother left Sethe’s mother behind, never smiling at her or saying goodbye. Horvitz claims that if this is so, there is another generation in the line of tortured, invisible women, all of them *Beloveds*, who have been cruelly severed from their mothers and daughters.⁶⁰ Thus, *Beloved* represents all the beloved ones lost during the Middle Passage and the pain of separation of a mother from a child. The following chapters express the fear of losing a beloved one and the need to become one with her: “Now I have found her in this house. She smiles at me and it is my own face smiling. I will not lose her again. She is mine...*Beloved* You are my sister You are my

⁵⁶ Horvitz, 158.

⁵⁷ Horvitz, 162.

⁵⁸ Rushdy, 577.

⁵⁹ *Beloved*, 253.

⁶⁰ Horvitz, 162.

daughter You are my face; you are me...You are my face; I am you....You are mine You are mine You are mine.”⁶¹ As Horvitz suggests, the style lacking punctuation expresses passion and the fantasy that it is possible to join with and possess the lost Beloved. It is a wish to be both “self” and “other” so as to regain the lost Beloved by becoming her. Moreover, it is clear that Sethe’s attempt to possess Beloved was fatal, as well as Beloved’s would be, for trying to possess any human being is destructive,⁶² as we will also see in *Sula*.

The process of Beloved making Sethe tell her stories is connected with the need to remember things, tell them aloud, and acknowledge them in order to be able to live fully again. Horvitz calls this the “responsibility to remember”⁶³ which Beloved teaches Sethe and other characters. They have to re-member and accept the past.

2.3 Conclusion

In *Sula*, the two families represent two different approaches which both give rise to an emotional distance. The Wright women follow the middle-class conventions and their definition of goodness which Morrison questions. The aim of their lives is to serve others and as a consequence of this, they repress their own needs, not being able to develop a self. Their motherly love is conventional, cold, and distanced. Contrary to this, the Peace women escape the conventionality. However, there is an emotional distance in their relationship all the same, created mainly by their poverty and ability to recognize and act upon their own needs. Thanks to this emotional distance, they are able to develop strong selves. Nevertheless, they are not able to connect emotionally with one another or with others, and they lack empathy.

Beloved portrays the horrors of slavery and its impacts on the mother-daughter relationships. The humiliation costs the slaves their dignity and sense of self. It is important for the characters to reconcile with the past, to understand the murder in a wider historical context. Beloved reminds them of the necessity to remember the stories of the lost Beloveds and teaches them that, as Horvitz says, memories and stories about matrilineal ancestry are life-giving.⁶⁴ Furthermore, it is clear that possessiveness is another destructive element in

⁶¹ Beloved, 254-256.

⁶² Horvitz, 162.

⁶³ Horvitz, 162.

⁶⁴ Horvitz, 157.

love, which combined with Sethe's too strong maternal love became reason for the infanticide and proves right Sethe's words that "Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer."⁶⁵

Both in *Beloved* and *Sula*, the mother-daughter relationship affects the development of the characters' selves. Moreover, Morrison shows how dangerous and destructive external factors can be for the mother-daughter relationships.

⁶⁵ *Beloved*, 155.

3. Self-love or Breaking the Bonds

Love your hands. Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them in your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, *you!* And no, they ain't in love with your mouth... You got to love it.⁶⁶

These lines from Morrison's *Beloved* delivered by Baby Suggs at a preaching characterize the idea of the content of this chapter. Morrison creates in her books different situations and lets her characters choose different paths on their search to self-worth. Most of the characters, however, try to define their selves through other people or different social roles, mostly without success. By examining the different levels of self-esteem of the characters in *Beloved*, different approaches to the human self will be portrayed. Moreover, it will be shown that self-worth is frequently connected with various other issues and that the characters often have to break different kinds of bonds throughout their quest for a self of their own. Self-love is often conditioned by mother love which is often made impossible by slavery in *Beloved*, having a great influence on the development of self-love.

3.1 Denver

The most significant change regarding self-love and the growth of personality can be observed in the character of Denver. The first time we encounter Denver, through the meeting with Paul D, she is a painfully shy, selfish, childlike, and immature girl, greatly dependent on her mother. Denver is very possessive and she claims the ownership of her mother from anyone.

Denver lives in a small world consisting of her mother, the house with the ghost of her sister, her secret room in the bushes, and herself. Denver wants to be the center of the world, which could be apparent from the fact that she makes her mother tell her the story about her birth again and again, not being interested in other stories: "Denver hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself, which is why Amy was all she ever asked about. The

⁶⁶ *Beloved*, 103-104.

rest was a gleaming, powerful world made more so by Denver's absence from it."⁶⁷ It seems as if she was still a little child, not being able to take any responsibility and having no personality.

With Paul D coming, Denver's life starts to undergo a great deal of change. Most importantly, he chases the ghost - Denver's only company - out of the house. Thus, he turns Denver's life upside down, making her learn and recognize the unknown - her self. She considers Paul D an unwelcome intruder and wants him to leave so she could have her mother all for herself again. Paul D can sense her negative attitude: "She's got a waiting way about her. Something she's expecting and it ain't me...Well, whatever it is, she thinks I'm interrupting it."⁶⁸ Denver feels threatened by Paul D's presence and by the possible romance between him and Sethe. Her childish behavior does not change until the arrival of Beloved, who is crucial for all characters, and for their development, reconciliation, and healing.

Denver believes Beloved is the embodiment of her killed sister and all her actions are based on this assumption. She tenderly takes care of her and this mere tending gives rise to Denver's transformation. However, she is being very possessive again and does not want even her beloved mother to interfere: "Patience, something Denver had never known, overtook her. As long as her mother did not interfere, she was a model of compassion, turning waspish, though, when Sethe tried to help."⁶⁹ Denver is hungry for Beloved's attention, even a mere look at her from Beloved is the most precious thing to her. Denver is scared to death of Beloved's possible disappearance: "This is worse. Then it was for herself. Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing."⁷⁰

Denver decides she will do anything to protect Beloved from her mother. "Maybe it's still in her [Sethe] the thing that makes it alright to kill her children. I have to protect her [Beloved],"⁷¹ she says. Even though Denver loves Sethe deeply, she is afraid of her: "I spent all of my outside self loving Ma'ma so she wouldn't kill me, loving her when she braided my

⁶⁷ Beloved, 74.

⁶⁸ Beloved, 50.

⁶⁹ Beloved, 65.

⁷⁰ Beloved, 145.

⁷¹ Beloved, 243.

hair at night.”⁷² Nevertheless, this changes as the time progresses. Soon Beloved starts to blame Sethe who begins to explain, apologize, and make her understand. As Beloved grows bigger, more demanding, and also meaner, Denver realizes it is her mother who needs her protection. “The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved. Now it was obvious that her mother could die and leave them both and what would Beloved do then?”⁷³ This is the crucial point in Denver’s transformation. Only at this point does she realize there is no one who would take care of her because “neither Beloved nor Sethe seemed to care what the next day might bring (Sethe happy when Beloved was; Beloved lapping devotion like cream)...She would have to leave the yard, step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help.”⁷⁴ Denver has to overcome her fears for her mother’s sake.

Slowly, Denver discovers something completely new to her – selfness. When trying to save her mother, she realizes she is also saving herself. Denver’s transformation is completed after Beloved’s disappearance. Acting her age now, having found work, and planning to go to college, she changes entirely and drastically. The process almost kills Sethe but gives birth to the new Denver at the same time. No matter what Beloved means and symbolizes for the other characters, for Denver, Beloved is the embodiment of the future and selfhood. Thanks to Beloved, Denver is able to step from childhood into womanhood.

However, the process could never be completed if it was not connected with reconciliation with the past. Denver must come to terms with the past horrors that shaped her life. Denver is not able to cope with her mother’s deed and its following consequences. When one of her classmates asks her if her mother was in prison for murder and whether she was there with her, she is scared it might be true. When she finally has the strength to ask her mother, she cannot deal with the answer. “She went deaf rather than hear the answer...For two years she walked in a silence too solid for penetration...”⁷⁵ Her sense of hearing comes back again when she hears the ghost. However, the whole process does not end merely with

⁷² Beloved, 245.

⁷³ Beloved, 286.

⁷⁴ Beloved, 286.

⁷⁵ Beloved, 121,123.

the ability to hear and see, the understanding and acceptance of the past is important. As Rushdy claims, Denver will have to stop dwelling on her mother's history and recognize the larger communal history of slavery suffering.⁷⁶ It is necessary to understand the past and what made Sethe choose death over slavery, and thus understand her heritage and history.

Finally, the black community also plays an important role in Denver's search for her self, as it is outside the house where Denver realizes she has a self of her own: "It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve...it might not have occurred to her if she hadn't met Nelson Lord...All he did was smile and say, 'Take care of yourself, Denver.'"⁷⁷ The community helps Denver when she needs food and work. This leads us back to the more general and communal past, which is necessary to understand and acknowledge. Even the spirit of Baby Suggs tells Denver to "Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on."⁷⁸

In order to find her self, Denver had to break the too tight bond to her mother and accept the past, both personal and communal. The presence of Paul D, and later Beloved, started a process in which Denver was put face to face with the deeds of the past and with which she could not deal. She had to reconcile with the past in order to gain a self and start to value herself. Nevertheless, she had to understand not only the personal past deeds, she had to understand their context as well. To accomplish that, however, Denver had to leave the family circle and seek help in the community. As Rushdy points out: "There is another story besides Beloved's, a larger narrative besides the family's, a deeper pain than suspicion and fear and spite. She [Denver] follows her grandmother's advice and leaves the yard. By leaving the yard, she enables herself to know."⁷⁹

3.2 Paul D

Another character in *Beloved* who undergoes a change of self-perception is Paul D. His healing process is completely different from Denver's but is just as complicated. This healing process of the self and way to self-love is characterized primarily by the

⁷⁶ Rushdy, 581.

⁷⁷ *Beloved*, 297.

⁷⁸ *Beloved*, 288.

⁷⁹ Rushdy, 582.

understanding of manhood and it is marked by his immensely horrifying life experiences from slavery and imprisonment.

When still on the Sweet Home plantation run by Mr. Garner, Paul D called himself a man. He was not questioning his manhood and his selfness, as there was no need for that. Mr. Garner treated his slaves like men, trusted them, believed them, and listened to them. He encouraged them to correct him, let them “choose a horse or a wife, handle guns, even learn to reading if they wanted.”⁸⁰ However, Schoolteacher denied Paul D the manhood Mr. Garner granted him, and humiliated him so badly he thought he had lost not only his manhood but his very self as well, comparing himself to a rooster called Mister:

Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead, Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub.⁸¹

Schoolteacher did not consider the slaves men and he taught them that: “they were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home.”⁸² When sent to prison for the attempt on the life of his new owner, Brandywine, Paul D is further humiliated. He is treated worse than an animal, being imprisoned in a small box and working in a chain gang. All these memories are too painful to be remembered, making Paul D fight them back, not being able to tell Sethe about them, who partly shares the past with him. Paul D puts them into “a tobacco tin:”

Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn't get back from. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut. He would not pry it loose

⁸⁰ Beloved, 147.

⁸¹ Beloved, 86.

⁸² Beloved, 148.

now...the contents...would shame him. And it would hurt her [Sethe] to know there was no red heart...⁸³

For Paul D, this is the only way to survive. Therefore, by the time he arrives at 124 he “shut down a generous portion of his head operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing. If he could do those things – with a little work and a little sex thrown in – he asked for no more.”⁸⁴

Regardless of the painfulness of the past experience and the harshness of the treatment, he is not forced to lose his sense of manhood completely, until Beloved’s seduction. Beloved, “moves him,” makes him restless, and he is not able to control or understand himself and his feelings. Beloved forces him to touch her “on the inside part,” to have sex with her and “each time she came, pulled up her skirts, a life hunger overwhelmed him and he had no control over it than over his lungs.”⁸⁵ As Mary Paniccia Carden suggests in her essay, Paul D is not only ashamed of himself for having sex with a girl young enough to be his daughter, but Beloved’s superior behavior puts him into the inferior position, revising the traditional idea of the dominance of a man. The confusion of the gender roles reminds him of the illusory manhood of Sweet Home.⁸⁶ Moreover, not being able to fight back the girl, his lust, and her manipulation, he fears losing Sethe as a result. He wants to confess everything to Sethe: “He needed her, Sethe, to help him, to know about it, and it shamed him to have to ask the woman he wanted to protect to help.”⁸⁷ However, he is not able to confess it and asks Sethe to have his child instead, finding suddenly “a solution: a way to hold on to her [Sethe], document his manhood and break out of the girl’s [Beloved] spell – all in one.”⁸⁸

Being ashamed of his sexual encounters with Beloved, Paul D fails to understand that Beloved is helping him. Beloved acts as a healer to him, as she was a healer to Denver, making him come to terms with his past. The sexual encounter with Beloved opened up the

⁸³ Beloved, 86.

⁸⁴ Beloved, 49.

⁸⁵ Beloved, 311.

⁸⁶ Mary Paniccia Carden, “Models of Memory and Romance: The Dual Endings of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Twentieth Century Literature*, Dec. 1999: 11.

⁸⁷ Beloved, 149.

⁸⁸ Beloved, 151.

tobacco tin in his chest. “When the lid gave he didn’t know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, ‘Red heart. Red heart,’ over and over again.”⁸⁹ As Carden asserts, Beloved’s emptiness reaches Paul D’s emptiness in the sexual encounter and the act seems to signify the possibility of reencountering the past. The encounter with Beloved is an encounter with memory and it stages Paul D’s necessary engagement with the avoided past and leads to reanimation of his red heart.⁹⁰

His healing process, however, is not to be completed yet, as the revelation of Sethe’s infanticide makes Paul D leave and he starts to reconsider the manhood he accepted from Mr. Garner. With his red heart back and the tobacco tin opened, everything seems different. He suddenly realizes that the assumption that Schoolteacher “broke into children what Garner had raised into men”⁹¹ might have been wrong. He cannot stop wondering why it is so clear Sixo and Halle were men, but “concerning his own manhood, he could not satisfy himself on that point. Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner’s gift, or his own will? What would have been anyway – before Sweet Home – without Garner?”⁹² Eventually, Paul D returns to 124, without his motives being clear, as Carden points out.⁹³ However, it is interesting to note that Paul D has to leave the house to undertake his reexamination. Thus, the role of community seems to be important again. Finally, his thinking, reconsidering, and coming to terms with the past is completed and he is ready to “put his story next to Sethe’s.” It is Sethe and their love that eventually helps him understand his manliness and he realizes that: “Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that.”⁹⁴

Paul D has to reconcile with the past and reconsider his manhood. Beloved acts as a healer, making Paul D face the past horrors of his life. As Elizabeth Ann Poe puts it in her book, when under Beloved’s spell he is shamed so deeply it makes him question the manhood Mr. Garner so unconventionally upheld.⁹⁵ In the end, he realizes that the manhood Mr. Garner granted him was not real and that he should be ashamed of himself for judging Sethe too

⁸⁹ Beloved, 138.

⁹⁰ Carden, 15.

⁹¹ Beloved, 260.

⁹² Beloved, 260.

⁹³ Carden, 21.

⁹⁴ Beloved, 322.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Ann Poe, *Toni Morrison’s Beloved* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 7.

quickly and for leaving her. She is the only one who does not question the manhood he chooses: the new one, his own, based on his reconciliation with the past and on his love for Sethe, as I will show in the last chapter.

3.3 Sethe

Sethe is the character with the least developed sense of self. Her healing process is the most complicated, as it is threefold. She needs the help of Beloved, Paul D, and the community to go through an immensely painful healing process in which she has to break the bonds with her children and the past in order to find her self and to be able to live again. However, only the power of Paul D's love and the role of the whole community will be dealt with presently, as the healing process Beloved puts her through was covered in the previous chapter.

Sethe kills a part of herself by killing her child and denies herself any future for, according to Demetracopoulos, she killed her future by killing her daughter.⁹⁶ Not being able to reconcile with her act, she loses her selfhood. Sethe herself explains that:

Anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own.⁹⁷

However, Sethe seems to have a strong personality, a strong self, but only for a particular reason. After killing her child, Sethe remains strong for her mother-in-law Baby Suggs and for her remaining children. As Demetrakopoulos points out, she is proud and independent. Sethe devotes herself to Denver and to "keeping the past at bay," denying herself or Denver any kind of future.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Demetracopoulos, 53.

⁹⁷ Beloved, 296.

⁹⁸ Demetracopoulos, 56.

The healing process starts when Paul D comes and makes her think about herself again. She even thinks she can have some future with him. She hopes she might be able to “trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank.”⁹⁹ The healing process is nevertheless interrupted by the arrival of Beloved. The loss of Sethe’s self is most apparent from the fact that she and Beloved seem to switch identities. “Sometimes coming upon them making men and women cookies or tacking scraps of cloth on Baby Suggs’ old quilt, it was difficult for Denver to tell who is who.”¹⁰⁰ Sethe has to lose herself in Beloved completely in order to find a new self. The community plays an important role when Sethe mistakes Denver’s future employer for her former slaveholder and attempts to kill him. The women from the community stop her, avoiding a fatal error. When Beloved disappears, Paul D comes back and encourages Sethe to find her self again, telling her that “you your best thing, Sethe. You are.”¹⁰¹ As Demetrakopoulos points out, Sethe’s acceptance of her need for Paul D and his sense of her wonderful self foreshadow healing and a plan for future and she finally moves towards individuation.¹⁰²

Sethe has to confront the murder of her own daughter and she needs to stop defining herself through her children. After she breaks her bonds to her children and the past, Paul D and his love might be able to help her to find her self again.

3.4 Conclusion

In *Beloved*, self-love is predominantly connected with reconciliation with the past. It is important for the characters not to forget things, but to re-member them, come to terms with them in order to be able to live with them. Moreover, the characters have to dis-attach themselves from other people through whom they define their selves. Sethe has to stop defining her self through her children, Denver has to find her self by breaking away from her mother, and Paul D has to dis-attach himself from the illusionary Sweet Home-manhood, and learn to love again. However, they all need help from somebody else. Paul D’s love helps Sethe and vice versa and Beloved helps them all to reconcile with the past.

⁹⁹ *Beloved*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ *Beloved*, 283.

¹⁰¹ *Beloved*, 322.

¹⁰² Demetrakopoulos, 54.

4. Friendship

“Not much has been written about women as friends,” claims Toni Morrison.¹⁰³ There is a great number of works written about male friendship. Female friendship, however, seems to be neglected. Morrison set out to change this and *Sula* is the result of her attempt. As Jan Furman points out, in examining the friendship of the two protagonists, Morrison tests its endurance and lets them together face life, death, marriage, and eventually separation.¹⁰⁴ Friendship in *Sula* is surely one of the major themes explored in the book. Furthermore, it seems to be partly the result of complicated and dysfunctional mother-daughter bonds. Examining this strong but intricate friendship, its role in the lives of the characters will be discussed as well as its effects on other social roles and relationships.

4.1 Sula and Nel

When Sula Peace and Nel Wright first meet, they “felt the ease and comfort of old friends...Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on.”¹⁰⁵ They find refuge from their family differences in each other’s company. As Gillespie and Kubitschek point out, the friendship nurtures both girls by supplying what they lack from their family relationships.¹⁰⁶ At the age of twelve they are still “unshaped, formless things,” however, “Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes.”¹⁰⁷ Their friendship is very intense, they never quarrel, they share everything, and they seem to complement each other. However, there are certain situations which differentiate them and slowly create boundaries between them.

One of these situations is when Sula, in order to threaten white boys who might hurt them, takes a knife and cuts off the tip of her finger. When holding the knife, Sula is still not sure about what she will do. “Her aim was determined but inaccurate.”¹⁰⁸ Nel only watches

¹⁰³ Jan Furman, “Black Girlhood and Black Womanhood: *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*” in *Toni Morrison's Fiction* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) 9.

¹⁰⁴ Furman, 9.

¹⁰⁵ *Sula*, 52.

¹⁰⁶ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 40.

¹⁰⁷ *Sula*, 53.

¹⁰⁸ *Sula*, 54.

Sula, not saying a word and, as Bakerman claims, she does not consider herself to be a part of that moment.¹⁰⁹ Another instance is a sequence of events rather than a single one. Initially, Sula overhears her saying she loves Sula but she does not like her. Fortunately, “Nel’s call floated up and into the window, pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight.”¹¹⁰ Right after this episode, Nel and Sula play on a riverbank, digging up holes with a twig and later burying in all kinds of things they find around themselves in these holes. As Furman points out, Nel and Sula are joined in this symbolic sexual play and it defines the profound intimacy of their friendship.¹¹¹

The crucial incident is the accidental death of a little boy called Chicken Little. When still at the riverbank, the boy comes around and Sula wants to play with him. She swings him around and “when he slipped from her hands and sailed away out over the water they could still hear his bubbly laughter.”¹¹² While Sula is shocked and stiffened with terror, Nel is calm and consoles Sula: “Sh, sh. Don’t, don’t. You didn’t mean it. It ain’t your fault. Sh. Sh. Come on, le’s go, Sula.”¹¹³ Nel thinks it is entirely Sula’s fault and again excludes herself from this event. Moreover, she regards herself to be the good one, or even the better one. Already at the funeral, the consequences of this affair begin to slowly surface: “Nel and Sula did not touch hands or look at each other during the funeral. There was a space, a separateness, between them.”¹¹⁴ While Sula simply cries, Nel is afraid that someone will discover her fear and blame her for the accident and “although she knew she had “done nothing,” she felt convicted and hanged right there in the pew.”¹¹⁵ As Jones points out, Nel separates herself from Sula and casts herself as the innocent victim.¹¹⁶ At that moment however, neither of them realize the importance of this incident.

Five years later, Nel gets married and Sula leaves the town to go to college, coming back after ten years. This nevertheless does not change their friendship. However, the fact that

¹⁰⁹ Bakerman, 551.

¹¹⁰ Sula, 57.

¹¹¹ Furman, 9.

¹¹² Sula, 60-61.

¹¹³ Sula, 62-63.

¹¹⁴ Sula, 64.

¹¹⁵ Sula, 65.

¹¹⁶ Jones, 621.

Sula was absent indicates some kind of alternation. It seems that when Sula comes back, she has already reclaimed the self she lost as a child. The two friends talk as easily as they did ten years ago and Nel contemplates the nature of their friendship: “Sula. Who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy...with whom the present was a constant sharing of perception. Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself.”¹¹⁷ With Sula back, Nel’s life seems to brighten up again. With Sula, “humor returned” to Nel’s life and “even Nel’s love for Jude, which over the years had spun a steady grey web around her heart, became a bright and easy affection, a playfulness that was reflected in their lovemaking.”¹¹⁸ Nel helps Sula to handle practical matters and difficulties because “when it came to matters of grave importance, she [Sula] behaved emotionally and irresponsibly and left it to others to straighten out.”¹¹⁹ Everything seems to be perfect until Nel finds Sula in bed with Jude.

This affair is the worst thing that could possibly happen to Nel from her perspective. The two people she loved the most in the world had deceived her. In one day, she loses her beloved husband and her best friend and “that was too much. To lose Jude and not to have Sula to talk about it because it was Sula that he had left her for.”¹²⁰ For Nel, this episode ends their friendship and she blames Sula for the collapse of her marriage and is not able to forgive her this betrayal. As Gillespie and Kubitschek point out, Nel’s refusal to forgive Sula is connected with conventions, as Sula breaks the social conventions Nel believes in.¹²¹

At this point we cannot help but ask with Nel: How could Sula, her best friend, do it to her? The answer could be found in Sula’s upbringing, her lack of knowledge of marriage, the absence of possessiveness, and the belief that she and Nel could share everything. Sula thinks about Nel’s accusations and does not understand why Nel is upset about the affair because: “They always shared the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed, what line he used with one and then with the other.”¹²² Sula was brought up in a family where

¹¹⁷ Sula, 95.

¹¹⁸ Sula, 95.

¹¹⁹ Sula, 101.

¹²⁰ Sula, 110.

¹²¹ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 34.

¹²² Sula, 119.

possessiveness was unknown and jealousy unthinkable, as all men were considered available. Thus, Sula “had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude.”¹²³ It seems she just wanted to share another experience and talk it over later with Nel. Sula realizes marriage changed it all and made it impossible for them to share a man. She could not understand that, as she “had no intimate knowledge of marriage.”¹²⁴

Sula knows that the town’s community hates her. She does not believe, and thus does not follow, the social rules of the community. She does not mind being hated and being an outcast. She cares only about Nel and has always thought Nel would understand everything she did and would never judge her. Nel is “the one person who had wanted nothing from her, who had accepted all aspects of her”¹²⁵ and she is one of the reasons Sula came back to Medallion. However, Nel takes the side with the rest of the community and “it had surprised her [Sula] a little and sadden her a good deal when Nel behaved the same way the others would have.”¹²⁶ Sula knows Nel irretrievably has become one of her enemies: “Now Nel was one of *them*. One of the spiders whose only thought was the next rung of the web, who dangled in the dark dry places suspended by their own spittle, more terrified of the free fall than the snake’s breath below.”¹²⁷

As Nel considers herself a good person, she decides to visit Sula when she finds out Sula is ill. As Bakerman points out, the visit is merely a part of Nel’s “respectable” role,¹²⁸ she still has not forgiven Sula, Nel still has “the taste of Jude’s exit in her mouth.”¹²⁹ Nel finally has the strength to ask Sula why she had to have the affair with Jude. Sula explains that there was some space in her head and Jude filled it. Nel cannot believe Sula did not even have feelings for Jude and asks Sula: “But what about me? Didn’t I count? I never hurt you. What did you take him for if you didn’t love him and why didn’t you think about me?...I was good to you, Sula, why don’t that matter?...We were friends...You had to take him away.”¹³⁰

¹²³ Sula, 119.

¹²⁴ Sula, 119.

¹²⁵ Sula, 119, 120.

¹²⁶ Sula, 120.

¹²⁷ Sula, 120.

¹²⁸ Bakerman, 553.

¹²⁹ Sula, 138.

¹³⁰ Sula, 144-145.

However, instead of the apologies, Sula asks: “What do you mean take him away? I didn’t kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn’t get over it?”¹³¹ As Furman points out, with Sula’s question Morrison calls into doubt the primacy of Nel’s marriage over the friendship, intimating their friendship may even supplant the marriage.¹³² Before Sula dies she not only puts in question her guilt in the collapse of their friendship, but she also makes clear that Nel could have been wrong about her own goodness when she asks Nel: “How do you know?...About who was good. How you know it was you?...I mean maybe it wasn’t you. Maybe it was me.”¹³³

Years after Sula’s death, Nel goes to visit Sula’s grandmother Eva at a nursing home. Eva seems to be a little bit out of her mind and Nel is not sure Eva recognizes her. Eva’s questions not only confuse her, they terrify her, as Eva brings back in question Chicken’s death and Nel’s guilt. Nel seems unable to understand what Eva means by saying: “You was there. You watched, didn’t you?”¹³⁴ Nel is scared and rushes out, away from Eva and her accusations which have shaken her image of a good person. However, when outside, she thinks about the event again and finally faces the “old feeling and old question. The good feeling she had had when Chicken’s hands slipped...‘Why didn’t I feel bad when it happened? How come it felt so good to see him fall?’” She finally acknowledges the thing she was afraid to even think about for years: “What she thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquillity 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.”¹³⁵ She confesses to herself that she was part of that moment too, for she was interested, as Sula was, when watching her mother burn. Thus, she understands she might not be the good one in the end, as Sula suggested. Moreover, she realizes that the accident caused Sula to turn her back on all social conventions, whereas Nel decided to go the opposite way. As a consequence, Nel valued marriage more than Sula. Standing at Sula’s grave, Nel eventually cries and understands she sacrificed her friendship and that “All that time, I

¹³¹ Sula, 145.

¹³² Furman, 10.

¹³³ Sula, 146.

¹³⁴ Sula, 168.

¹³⁵ Sula, 170.

thought I was missing Jude...We was girls together...O Lord, Sula...girl, girl, girlgirlgirl.”¹³⁶

As Gillespie and Kubitschek explain, Nel finally abandons the conventional supreme attachment to her husband to mourn her greater loss; Sula’s friendship. Nel no longer denies her feelings and her own needs.¹³⁷

4.2 Conclusion

The book suggests Sula and Nel could not be complete without each other. Eva claims they are alike: “You. Sula. What’s the difference?...Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you.”¹³⁸ Undoubtedly, for Sula: “Nel was the first person who had been real to her, whose name she knew, who had seen the slant of life that made it possible to stretch it to its limits.” It was in each other’s eyes where they found “the intimacy they were looking for” and “in the safe harbor of each other’s company they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things.”¹³⁹ Their childhood friendship is doomed by violence and death, their different approaches to society and conventions, which Nel chooses to follow and Sula to ignore, and by Nel’s assumption about her superiority. As Nel believes in conventions, she thinks she is incomplete without her husband, and as Bakerman claims, it takes her much longer to realize that the great loss of her life was the destruction of the friendship, the only chance she had to learn to be a full, complete woman.¹⁴⁰ The destruction of the friendship caused their incompleteness and gave rise to dysfunction in their love-relationships illustrated in the following chapter.

¹³⁶ Sula, 174.

¹³⁷ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 34.

¹³⁸ Sula, 168, 169.

¹³⁹ Sula, 120, 52, 55.

¹⁴⁰ Bakerman, 553.

5. Male-female love

Male-female relationships can be found both in *Sula* and *Beloved*. However, those who expect romantic love stories will be disappointed. The relationships are challenged by different obstacles again. In *Sula*, the failure to recognize the importance of friendship and different approaches to conventions cause that Nel and Sula are unable to find satisfaction in their love relationships. Due to her lack of self-worth, Nel tries to define herself through marriage. Contrary to this, Sula's strong sense of self and the need to "meet" and "make" her self prevent her from making connections with other people.¹⁴¹ In *Beloved*, the love-relationships are also connected to different types of love. However, they seem to cooperate with one another. Moreover, the love-relationships are complicated as they are again linked to the past and reconciliation with it.

5.1 Love relationships in *Sula*

Love relationships in *Sula* could be divided into two groups - the Wright women and the Peace women. Their approaches to romantic love are completely different, having been shaped by their upbringing and by their sense of self-worth. For the Wright women, love is a synonym for marriage and the conventionality connected with it. The Peace women, and especially Sula, break from conventions, and male-female love is connected to sex and pleasure. They are concerned only about having their needs satisfied.

5.1.1 The nature of the Wright women's relationships with men arises from their attitude to society, convention, and marriage. Helene Wright is brought up in religious strictness by her grandmother. When Helene's grandmother's nephew comes to visit, she has the only chance to get "as far away from the Sundown House as possible" and his visit becomes "a marriage proposal – under the pressure of both women."¹⁴² Nel is brought up according to the social conventions and without emotions: "Under Helene's hand, the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed would be calmed by her

¹⁴¹ Robert B. Stepto, "Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Massachusetts Review* 18 1977: 473-489. Rpt. in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah ed. (New York: Amistad, 1993) 386.

¹⁴² *Sula*, 17.

mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground."¹⁴³ When Nel visits her grandmother, she realizes she can live against the social conventions that her mother follows so stringently. She realizes she despises the way her mother lives, thinking about the tight hug her grandmother gave her, deciding she will be different. She dreams of being wonderful and traveling alone to distant lands and is determined to be herself despite her mother who "loved her house and enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband."¹⁴⁴ Nel will not let her mother do so. "I'm me, I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me."¹⁴⁵

Even though Nel was determined to be different, she fails in that effort. Nel marries young, living up to her mother's expectations and following the social conventions. As Furman points out, in marrying Jude, Nel gives up her dreams and me-ness and follows her mother's example, as for Helene, marriage is one of the neat conditions of living that defines a woman's place, and Nel accepts a similar arrangement.¹⁴⁶ Nel does not even choose her husband, instead she accepts his choosing her and she "seemed receptive but hardly anxious."¹⁴⁷ According to Bakerman, Nel's marriage is limiting rather than defining.¹⁴⁸

Jude believes that real work that would help him feel like a real man is the way to define himself and his manhood. Having been dismissed, racial oppression being the main reason, he decides to get married, as he needs someone who will cure his pain: "he wanted someone to care about his hurt, to care deeply...And if he were to be man, that someone could no longer be his mother. He chose the girl who had always been kind"¹⁴⁹ and "the two of them together would make one Jude."¹⁵⁰ As Furman puts it, Jude is a fractional individual who needs somebody else to be complete.¹⁵¹ The marriage collapses when Sula shows Nel another way of behaving. When Jude tells them a story about "some personal insult done him by a customer and his boss,"¹⁵² Nel wants to comfort her husband but Sula does not agree and turns the story upside down. As Gillespie and Kubitschek point out, her humorous rejoinder

¹⁴³ Sula, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Sula, 18.

¹⁴⁵ Sula, 28.

¹⁴⁶ Furman, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Sula, 82.

¹⁴⁸ Bakerman, 552.

¹⁴⁹ Sula, 82.

¹⁵⁰ Sula, 83.

¹⁵¹ Furman, 13.

¹⁵² Sula, 103.

that the whole world is obsessed with Jude's privates makes Jude aware of a viewpoint other than his own, and he realizes that Nel's goodness can never heal his hurts and he moves towards self-recognition.¹⁵³ Jude has an affair with Sula and leaves Nel and their children, realizing his faults in trying to prove himself a man through marriage. Morrison nevertheless does not follow up on Jude's possible self-growth. Nel's world falls apart and is devastated. According to Bakerman, their marriage provides Nel with respectability, but is doomed 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.¹⁵⁴

The Wright women try to find love in marriage and conventionality. Furthermore, for Nel, marriage is a tool for defining her self, as she does not value herself highly. Similarly, Jude tries to define his manliness in marriage.

5.1.2 Generally, "Peace women loved all men...It was man love that Eva bequeathed to her daughters...The Peace women simply loved maleness, for its own sake."¹⁵⁵ They are single and stand apart from the social conventions.

Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother, was married, but her husband left her after five years of their marriage. "When he left her in November, Eva had \$1.65, five eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel."¹⁵⁶ When he comes back after several years, she does not know what to feel again. She just waits for the feeling to come and figure it out for her. "It hit her like a sledge hammer...A liquid trail of hate flooded her chest."¹⁵⁷ She never remarries nor has she any lovers, even though she has many male "callers." Hannah, whose husband died early, wants "some touching every day,"¹⁵⁸ contrary to Eva. She refuses to live without a man's attention and she has "a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of friends and neighbors."¹⁵⁹

Sula watches her mother and the men that keep coming and the easiness with which her mother takes men and she thinks "sex was pleasant and frequent, but otherwise

¹⁵³ Gillespie and Kubitschek, 32.

¹⁵⁴ Bakerman, 552.

¹⁵⁵ Sula, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Sula, 32.

¹⁵⁷ Sula, 36.

¹⁵⁸ Sula, 44.

¹⁵⁹ Sula, 42.

unremarkable,” and she “made up her own mind”¹⁶⁰ about it. Moreover, her mother is not jealous, she makes no demands, she never tries to possess any men, and there is “no passion attached to her relationships.”¹⁶¹ Therefore, by the time Sula comes back to Medallion after ten years, she already knows that “a lover was not a comrade and could never be – for a woman. And that no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out to and touch with an ungloved hand.”¹⁶² Her grandmother Eva scolds Sula for not settling down: “‘You need to have some babies. It’ll settle you.’ ‘I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself.’ ‘Selfish. Ain’t no woman got no business floatin’ around without no man.’”¹⁶³ And, indeed, Sula cares only about making herself, a fact reflected even in her love-making. As Jones suggests, sexuality is not the attempt to meet with the other, but only with herself:¹⁶⁴ “She wept then...[in] the postcoital privateness in which she met herself, welcomed herself, and joined herself in matchless harmony.”¹⁶⁵ Sula thus pays no attention to her grandmother’s words. She is determined to live according to her principles; 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. As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure...”¹⁶⁶ As Furman suggests, Sula never needed a man to extend herself.¹⁶⁷ She takes men as easily as her mother used to, and, because she does not know what possessiveness is, she even has sex with her best friend’s husband.

However, everything changes temporarily when Sula meets Ajax. “Sula began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it. She was astounded by so new and alien a feeling.”¹⁶⁸ She watches herself in the mirror for the first time, looking at her wrinkles, trying to figure out whether she is beautiful or not. She cleans up the house and sets the table, and wonders if he will come that day. As Jones points out, Ajax is the only character who is independent, free, and strong, which is also what he

¹⁶⁰ Sula, 44.

¹⁶¹ Sula, 44.

¹⁶² Sula, 121.

¹⁶³ Sula, 92.

¹⁶⁴ Jones, 622.

¹⁶⁵ Sula, 123.

¹⁶⁶ Sula, 118.

¹⁶⁷ Furman, 12.

¹⁶⁸ Sula, 131.

likes about Sula.¹⁶⁹ Ajax is a character who is connected with planes and flying in the book. As Furman points out, Ajax is metaphorically always on a flight from conventionality.¹⁷⁰ Like Sula, he comes and goes as he pleases, never making any demands. As soon as Sula shows signs of possessiveness, Ajax feels the urge to leave. “Every hackle on his body rose, and he knew that very soon she would, like all of her sisters before her, put to him the death-knell question ‘Where have you been?’ His eyes dimmed with mild and momentary regret.”¹⁷¹ Sula suffers a lot, not only because she loses someone she loves, but also because she betrays herself in wanting to possess someone. What is worse, she realizes it was not real at all. She permitted herself to believe in somebody else than herself for the first time and it is a fatal mistake. When she looks for some evidence of his presence, she finds his driving license and discovers she did not even know his real name. “And even late, when for the first time in her life she had lain in bed with a man and said his name involuntarily or said it truly meaning really him, the name she was screaming and saying was not his at all.”¹⁷²

For the Peace women, unconventionality is typical, especially for Sula. They are strong and independent and do not need a man to define themselves. Love is connected with sex and pleasure for them and they never try to possess men.

5.2 Love relationships in *Beloved*

Love in *Beloved* is rather hard to define. We cannot call it neither romantic nor erotic love, as it is always more complex and there is more to it than that. Even though there could be traced more love relationships in the book, I will focus only on love between Paul D and Sethe. The love-relationships in *Beloved* are not ordinary love stories, as love between a man and a woman is challenged by the past, and Morrison shows again the past’s importance. As Carden points out, the novel’s central romance plot is aimed at pulling the past into a manageable framework through “mutual talking cure.”¹⁷³

5.2.1 When Paul D arrives at 124 Sethe had given up on all the other kinds of love except for mother love. When she sees Paul D at her house, she does not seem to be taken

¹⁶⁹ Jones, 622.

¹⁷⁰ Furman, 13.

¹⁷¹ Sula, 133.

¹⁷² Sula, 136.

¹⁷³ Carden, 11.

aback by his arrival. They talk to each other easily, almost as if it was only yesterday, not the eighteen years since they last saw each other. Right away, she tells him about one of the most humiliating experiences she has had and about a “chokecherry tree” she has on her back after a severe beating. Paul D “rubbed his cheek on her [Sethe] back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches...and would not tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth.”¹⁷⁴ The fact that they knew each other before could be a reason why “not quite in a hurry, but losing no time, Sethe and Paul D climbed the white stairs.”¹⁷⁵ After making love, Paul D is looking at Sethe without judging her, but not passionately or lovingly either. He looks at her with interest “as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality.”¹⁷⁶ There is no falling in love with each other - their love seems pre-determined. It is not passionate, crazy, romantic love; however, it is not rational love either. They “had skipped love and promise and went directly to ‘you saying it’s all right to scramble here?’”¹⁷⁷

At the beginning, both Sethe and Paul D have their doubts. Sethe is thinking about her mother-in-law’s words that “a man is nothing but a man” and Paul D is concerned about Sethe loving Denver too much. Paul D thinks that the best thing “was to love just a little bit...so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you’d have a little love left over for the next one.”¹⁷⁸ Moreover, after being in the chain gang in Alfred, it is very difficult for Paul D to settle down. He does not “believe he could live with a woman – any woman – for over two out of three months...walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat, or swing a sledge hammer in chains.”¹⁷⁹ Regardless of these difficulties, Paul D promises Sethe a better life. Moreover, he allows her to remember things safely with him because he would “catch her if she sank” and she can “go as far inside as you need to, I’ll hold your ankles. Make sure you

¹⁷⁴ Beloved, 20-21.

¹⁷⁵ Beloved, 24.

¹⁷⁶ Beloved, 30.

¹⁷⁷ Beloved, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Beloved, 54.

¹⁷⁹ Beloved, 49.

get back out.”¹⁸⁰ As Carden says, Paul D offers her life through a romance that builds on and reshapes their shared past.¹⁸¹ In spite of the disagreements and doubts, Sethe allows herself to believe that Paul D does not want her to choose him over Denver, but rather to make space “for somebody along with her” so they “can make a life...A life.”¹⁸² The shared past and the fact that they can tell each other things they were not able to tell anybody else is the most important feature of their love.

Sethe’s imagination of a future with Paul D is interrupted by the arrival of Beloved. Her arrival brings into question Sethe’s murder of her child, which scares Paul D, becoming one of the reasons he leaves Sethe. Sethe thinks that “the things neither knew about the other – the things neither had word-shapes for – well, it would come in time.”¹⁸³ It did come, but Paul D believes Sethe’s love is “too thick.” Moreover, being ashamed of himself for the sexual intercourse with Beloved, he quickly judges Sethe for her deed, realizing too late what he said. “You got two feet, Sethe, not four...Later he would wonder what made him say it. The calves of his mouth? or the conviction that he was being observed through the ceiling? How fast he has moved from his shame to hers. From his cold-house secret straight to her too-thick love.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, apart from being scared of Sethe, the reason for his escape is his shame.

As I have already mentioned, Beloved opens up Paul D’s tobacco tin where he hid his past and he begins to feel again. He realizes he closed his heart not only to the past but to love as well. Thus, the thought of staying and being with one woman for a longer period of time was something completely new for him. “Wanting to live out his life with a whole woman was new, and losing the feeling of it made him want to cry and think deep thoughts that struck nothing solid.”¹⁸⁵ He decides to settle down finally, not to be a man on the run anymore. As a result, he is able to find his true self and manhood. He is ashamed of himself for leaving Sethe

¹⁸⁰ Beloved, 21, 55.

¹⁸¹ Carden, 6.

¹⁸² Beloved, 55.

¹⁸³ Beloved, 116.

¹⁸⁴ Beloved, 194.

¹⁸⁵ Beloved, 261.

and he goes back because Sethe needs him to rebuild her self as well. He realizes that Sethe was right: “Love is or it ain’t.”¹⁸⁶

5.3 Conclusion

In *Sula*, romantic love is challenged by conventionality and self worth. Nel’s and Jude’s attempt to define themselves through marriage dooms the marriage and their love. Sula, on the contrary, has a strong sense of self. She is literally self-ish and does not want to “make” anybody else but herself. Paradoxically, Sula’s unconventionality does not function either as “she has troubles making connections with other people.”¹⁸⁷ As soon as Sula tries to possess her lover, forgetting to be consistent with her self, she destroys the relationship as well. In *Beloved*, romantic love was connected with mutual talking cure and the ability to forget and stop dwelling on the past. Only with the help of Paul D, and his love, is Sethe able to find her self and love again. Similarly, Paul D needs Sethe and her love to understand his shortcomings.

¹⁸⁶ *Beloved*, 194.

¹⁸⁷ *Septo*, 386.

6. Conclusion

As each chapter has a separate conclusion on its own, I will make only general observations. As I have already argued, Morrison created a new definition of love. She highlights the complexity of love and studies extreme situations of lack or excess of certain types of love. As McDowell points out, Morrison portrays possessive, protective, God-like, and self-sacrificing love,¹⁸⁸ which is often unconventional, controversial, and violent. Morrison insists that love always passes us by, dealing with this theme so often to warn the readers of the things that can go wrong in love.¹⁸⁹

My analyses seem to suggest that the external factors are actually the most important features shaping the characters' lives and loves. Morrison explores primarily conventions in *Sula* and the impact of slavery in *Beloved* and possessiveness in both. In *Sula*, Morrison uses two families to discuss two diverse approaches to conventions. The Wright women follow strictly the social conventions, and they base their lives on conventionalism and their determination to live according to the middle class conventions. This results in their ignorance of their own needs as they tend to care about other people and their needs instead of their own. Moreover, they seem not to have a strong sense of self and try to find it in relationships with other people. Initially, Nel has a chance to find completeness with Sula, as their friendship gives her what she lacks. However, Nel chooses to follow the conventions, ending the friendship when Sula's actions do not fit into the social conventions Nel believes in. Their inability to recognize the importance of the friendship dooms their romantic relationships. Nel is not able to learn from Sula not to follow the conventions so strictly and she tries to define her self in the marriage, devoting her life to her husband and children. As soon as an unconventional attitude is brought to the marriage, it falls apart. It takes Nel a long time to realize it was not Sula who destroyed Nel's marriage but Nel's attempt to define her self through the marriage.

¹⁸⁸ McDowell, 8-9.

¹⁸⁹ Toni Morrison, Danille Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie ed., *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) 31-32.

The Peace women face rather different issues. Initially, Eva Peace has to fight poverty. In order to deal practically with poverty, Eva distances herself from her children emotionally. Moreover, most of her actions and solutions are unconventional, which, together with emotional distance creates perfect conditions for developing a strong, independent self. However, the Peace women exaggerate their sense of self and become selfish and cruel. Their emotional distance widens as their sense of a self increases, preventing them from being able to connect with one another or with other people. Sula can find solace in her friendship with Nel but she is not able to learn from Nel the empathy she lacks. Her selfishness and ignorance of people's emotions cause the destruction of their friendship. As a result, Sula is not able to find satisfaction in love relationships either. She is only interested in having her own needs satisfied and when she finds someone similar to her, she destroys the relationship by attempting to possess the person she loves. Nevertheless, both Nel and Sula realize their mistakes in the end, acknowledging that the destruction of their friendship was the biggest loss of their lives. If they had been able to understand the lesson, they would have overcome the obstacles of the emotional distance of their mother-daughter relationships. Thus, it appears that the ignorance of the friendship prevents other types of love to function.

We could see that characters in *Beloved* are influenced by slavery and their attempt to ignore the past. As in *Sula*, the external factors influence initially the mother-daughter bond. Slavery makes the mother unavailable and the horrors of slavery are so unbearable that the slaves choose death rather than living in slavery. Morrison tries to set the infanticide into a larger historical frame and to show that Sethe was not an exception. This is designed to cast Sethe in different light. *Beloved* argues that the characters have to reconcile with the past in order to have a chance to live a full life. As in *Sula*, the mother-daughter relationship is not functioning properly and we can see a connection to self love as well. Sethe defines her self through her children and when she kills her daughter, claiming the possession of her, she loses her sense of self. *Beloved* comes to help Sethe and all the other characters to understand the importance of accepting the deed and reconciling with the past, as well as the need to remember things, acknowledge them, and not to suppress them. On their search for a self, all the characters have to break a bond they have. Denver and Sethe have to dis-attach

themselves from one another, and Paul D has to dis-attach himself from the illusionary manhood. They all need the help of Beloved, who makes them understand they have to come to terms with their past as well as with their communal history. Moreover, they need the help of the community and each other. Finally, the different types of love seem to cooperate with one another, as both Sethe and Paul D need the mutual love to be able to find or create a self.

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České resumé

Ve své bakalářské práci porovnávám téma lásky ve dvou knihách první afroamerické spisovatelky, která obdržela Nobelovu cenu – Toni Morrison – a to konkrétně v její druhé knize, *Sula*, a v její páté knize, *Beloved*. V obou těchto knihách se Toni Morrison zevrubně zabývá různými druhy a podobami lásky. V úvodu zařazuji Toni Morrison do širšího literárního a kulturně-historického kontextu a nastiňuji situaci, v jaké Morrison byla, když psala tyto knihy. V této souvislosti jsem také načrtla situaci afroamerické ženské literatury té doby.

K výběru právě těchto dvou knih mě vedly především společné typy lásek, kterými se Morrison zabývá. Dalším motivem byl fakt, že Morrison popisuje bezpochyby nekonvenční, až kontroverzní příběhy a situace, namísto typických milostných příběhů. Mimo to, lásky i životy hrdinů obou knih jsou silně ovlivněny vnějšími faktory, které vedou k jejich dysfunkci, či zničení. V obou knihách porovnávám mateřskou lásku, sebelásku a lásku mezi ženou a mužem. V románu *Sula* přibývá navíc téma přátelství, které je stěžejním rozdílem mezi oběma knihami. Nicméně, *Sula* nemá zvláštní kapitolu na téma sebelásky, protože jednotlivé typy lásek od sebe nelze rozdělit a tento typ bude zahrnut v ostatních kapitolách právě proto, že je s nimi tak pevně spjat.

Další společný znak obou knih nás přivádí k tématu první kapitoly nazvané Mateřská láska. V této kapitole ukazují, že tento vztah je určujícím vztahem jak pro život jednotlivých hrdinů, tak i pro jejich vztahy s jinými lidmi a pro další druhy lásek. Téma mateřské lásky je zkoumáno v obou knihách, stejně tak jako vnější faktory, které tento vztah ovlivňují. V této kapitole uvidíme, že mateřství nebylo jednoduché pro žádnou afroamerickou ženu, a tím spíše pro otrokyni. V knize *Sula* na příkladu dvou rodin Morrison ukazuje problematiku mateřství a dalších dvou faktorů, které tento vztah komplikují. Rodiny dvou hlavních hrdinek – Suly a Nel – se liší v postoji ke konvencím střední třídy a v materiálním zázemí. Na rodině Nel Morrison ukazuje, že pedantské lpění na konvencích je spjato s tradiční definicí dobra. Tyto ženy nemají silný pocit svého já a slouží ostatním zapomínajíce na své vlastní potřeby a sny. Krom toho jejich konvenčnost vede k citové prázdnotě mezi matkou a dcerou. Na druhé

straně rodina Suly ignoruje konvence od samého počátku, kdy narazí na problém, kterým je chudoba. Eva Peace, Sulina babička, řeší problém zcela nekonvenčně, když nechává své děti na celých osmnáct měsíců u sousedky a vrací se bez jedné nohy, ale s plnou peněženkou. Eva se citově odpoutává od svých dětí, aby byla schopná vyřešit materiální problém a udržela tak na živu jak sebe, tak i své děti. Tato citová propast se projevuje již na vztahu Evy a její dcery Hannah, která pochybuje, že Eva kdy svoje děti milovala. Hannah po své matce zdědí nejen tuto odtažitost vůči své dceři, ale i silné já, kterým se tolik liší od rodiny Nel. Schopnost žen Suliny rodiny vytvořit si a zachovat si silné já jim znemožňuje plně komunikovat mezi sebou a vcítit se do někoho jiného a pochopit jeho potřeby. Jedním z dalších nekonvenčních činů, kterého se Eva dopustí, je vražda jejího syna Pluma, který se zabíjí užíváním drog, což Eva nemůže snést.

V *Beloved* je hlavním faktorem komplikující mateřskou lásku otroctví. To znemožňuje ženám plně milovat své děti, které jim vlastně nepatří, stejně tak jako jim bere pocit, že jsou lidské bytosti, které mají své já. Hlavní hrdinka Sethe utíká z plantáže Sweet Home do svobodné země, kde chce milovat svoje děti tak, jak může svobodný člověk. Dopadena svým majitelem zabíjí svoji dceru, aby ji uchránila před otroctvím, které je pro ni horší než smrt. Neschopna vyrovnat se se svým činem, uzavírá se Sethe před světem a veškerou svoji lásku dává své jediné dceři Denver, která jí zůstala po útěku jejích dvou synů. Ten byl zapříčiněn přítomností ducha zabitě dcery vracejícího se mezi živé v podobě mladé ženy říkající si Beloved. S jejím příchodem procházejí všichni hrdinové procesem, ve kterém je nutí se vypořádat s minulostí. Především je to ale Sethe, která se musí vypořádat nejen se svým skutkem, ale musí pochopit i historii, jejíž součástí je jak ona, tak i předchozí generace žen a otrokyň - dcer, které byly odděleny od svým matek a zabity. Postava Beloved ztělesňuje nejen dceru Sethe, ale všechny milované dcery a matky, které zemřely během otroctví.

V další kapitole se zabývám podrobně sebeláskou postav v *Beloved*. Jak je již patrné z předchozí kapitoly, právě mateřská láska a vnější faktory komplikující tento vztah mají určující charakter pro sebelásku jednotlivých postav. V první knize jsme mohli vidět, že konvence vedly k popření vlastního já a že naopak nekonečnost dala možnost vzniku silného pocitu já. V *Beloved* je sebeláska opět spojena s dopadem otroctví a hrůz, kterými otroci

prošli. Všechny postavy v *Beloved* se musí zbavit silného pouta, přestat lpět na jiných lidech a vytvořit si svoje já nezávisle na těchto lidech či vztazích. Sethe musí přestat lpět na svých dětech, stejně tak jako Denver na své matce a osamostatnit se. Další postavou, která řeší problém svého já, je další otrok a přítel Sethe, Paul D. Jeho hledání vlastního já je především spjato s definicí mužství, které přijal od svého prvního majitele, pana Gaunera. Všechny postavy ale musí projít složitým procesem, kterým je opět provádí *Beloved* a která je opět nutí čelit jejich bolestem z minulosti, vyrovnat se s nimi a tak zapomenout a posunout se dál. Krom toho všechny postavy potřebují jeden druhého, jiné druhy lásek a společnost, ve které žijí. Paul D i Denver musí v určité chvíli opustit dům, v knize nazývaný jen podle čísla 124, a přijmout vědomě či nevědomě pomoc komunity. Právě komunita nakonec pomáhá i Sethe, která chce zabít nového zaměstnavatele Denver, jehož si splete se svým původním otrokářským majitelem.

V kapitole Přátelství je zastoupena pouze *Sula*, jelikož v *Beloved* toto téma není obsaženo. V tomto vztahu se střetávají dva rozdílné postoje reprezentované rodinami Nel a Suly ve formě přátelství těchto dvou dívek. Obě dívky v přátelství nacházejí útočiště před svými vlastními rodinami, které nemají rády. Jedna druhou doplňují, jejich přátelství je velice intimní. Právě jejich přátelství představuje řešení, díky kterému by se obě dívky mohly stát lepšími a kompletními. Nicméně, toto přátelství je poznamenáno tragickou nehodou, při které Sula zaviní smrt malého chlapce, když jí během dětské hry vyklouznou jeho ruce z jejího sevření a on se utopí v řece. V této chvíli je Nel přesvědčená, že ona je ta dobrá a Sula ta špatná a že jen Sula je vinna touto nehodou. Rozhodne se napodobit svoji matku a hledá útěchu v konvencích, kdežto Sula se definitivně rozhoduje konvence ignorovat. Jejich přátelství však ještě trvá, dokud Sula neporuší konvence, ve které Nel tolik věří. Sula, která byla zvyklá se vždy s Nel o vše dělit, má milostný poměr s Nelovým manželem, který následně Nel opouští. Nel je zrcena ztrátou manžela, upíná se na své děti a ukončuje přátelství se Sulou. Tím, že obě dívky nechápou, že toto přátelství bylo životadárné, nenacházejí útěchu ani ve svých milostných vztazích.

Milostné vztahy jsou předmětem poslední kapitoly, kde se opět střetávají obě knihy. Milostné vztahy jsou však v obou knihách diametrálně odlišné, především ženy jiným

vnějším faktorům, které se v knihách objevují. Jak již naznačuje předcházející kapitola, milostné vztahy v díle *Sula* jsou ovlivněny především konvencemi a vztahem k vlastnímu já. Ženy rodiny Wrightových, dodržující striktně konvence a zvyklosti střední třídy, považují za ideál brzké manželství, rodinu a život obětovaný uspokojováním potřeb manžela a dětí. To je model, který Nel zná od své matky Helene a který se přes svoje původní přesvědčení být jiná a sama sebou rozhodne následovat. Manželem se jí navíc stává Jude, který také v manželství hledá jen seberealizaci a potvrzení svého mužství. Právě kvůli jejich snaze definovat svoje já skrze manželství a díky nekonvenčnímu přístupu, který přináší Sula, se toto manželství rozpadá. Naopak ženy rodiny Peaceových jsou nezávislé a nekonvenční, nehledí na potřeby jiných, ale jen na své vlastní. Již Eva se po odchodu manžela rozhoduje zůstat sama a oddávat se pozornosti nápadníků. Hannah, která ovdoví a vrací se domů, aby se postarala o svoji matku, si užívá volnosti nezadané ženy a udržuje poměr s mnoha muži. Nesnaží se nikoho z nich získat a připoutat k sobě, nežárí a nevdává jí, že se o ně dělí s jejich manželkami. Právě v tomto prostředí vyrůstá Sula, která tuto nekonvenčnost a sobeckost přivádí do extrému. Právě tato výchova je důvodem, proč má poměr s manželem své nejlepší přítelkyně, nechápajíc, že Nel věří v tradiční hodnoty manželství i přátelství. Sula sama na chvíli pozná, jaké to je někoho milovat a chtít ho mít jen pro sebe, ale protože Ajax je stejně nespoutaný a nekonvenční jako ona, utíká před Sulou pryč. Až na smrtelné posteli konečně Sula prozře a pochopí, že největší ztrátou jejího života byla Nel a jejich přátelství. Nel toto pochopí až mnoho let po Sulině smrti.

Milostné vztahy v *Beloved* jsou opět poznamenány otroctvím a minulostí. Jediným a centrálním vztahem, který v této práci rozebírám, je láska mezi Sethe a Paulem D. Ten je založen především na společné minulosti, se kterou se oba hrdinové vyrovnávají tím, že ji jeden s druhým sdílí. Opět je zde vyzdvihována nutnost věcem čelit, říct je nahlas, vyrovnat se s nimi a pak je zapomenout. Právě láska pomáhá Sethe i Paulovi D najít jejich nové já a snad i nový společný život.