

FEMALE DESTRUCTION IN TONI MORRISON'S *SULA*

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ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison's works span for decades and are concerned with the study of women's inner lives. Morrison's studying of inner lives are real and it exists with the involvement in racism, sexism, which ideals over blacks. She gives us the realistic women, who trust in particular ideology that are unrealistic. Morrison's women, particularly African American women, are led to the destruction because of their belief in narratives which bring about the female damages. Female destruction means simply to explore them emotionally, and sometimes physically to some extent where she cannot continue to function for herself. Due to this the women give up a sense of their self and believe in a fantasy more than the real life around them. Morrison's works brings hope that there can be a resolution or growth of a sense of their self.

INTRODUCTION

Sula takes place within the black community. The insecurities of mother to daughter affect the growth of Nel and Sula. Nel's mother tries to shelter her daughter from the things she considers 'dirty'. Sula is free and open, but Nel's mother controls her. Sula's family fails to give her any discipline lifestyle in their black community. Nel and Sula find the love they need and together they make each other whole, but they failed to attain completeness.

The Western ideology of beauty does not cause these women any damage, but *Sula* faces inadequacies in their lives and are more separated from a white society. The relationship between the mother and the daughter functions abnormally and helps in bringing out the female destruction. Hortens Spillers discusses the mother and the daughter difficulties and Morrison's theme in *Sula*:

“In the relationship between Nel and Sula, Morrison demonstrates the female’s rites-of passage in their peculiar richness and impoverishment; the fabric of paradoxes ... betrays and sympathies, silences and aggressions, advances and sudden retreats ... transmitted from mother to daughter, female to female, by mimetic gesture” (226).

As stated the female merely acts on others, downplays their destruction, which imposed on Sula and Nel by their mothers and the community, destroy them unless they realize and tries to concern it. Morrison’s thematic focus in *Sula* is the relationship between Sula and Nel their lack of inability in attaining wholeness without the other. At the end Sula and Nel cannot come together; they have been destructed. This female destruction is emotionally and physically exposed as Trudeir Harris notes in *Fiction and Folklore: the Novels of Toni Morrison*. This female destruction affects everything around them:

None of these character portends the “happily ever after” dimension of the (fairy tale) formula. By novel’s end, the princess in dead, the prince has unwillingly led many of her adversaries to their deaths, the twin sister is almost crazy with grief, and the kingdom is slowly begun to destroyed” (55).

As in this above formula, the expectation is in opposition, as much like Sula and Nel. Because there is no special connective of both personalities, and the female destructive consumes these both, and their families, and their community. Sula and Nel cannot find any other friendship and so they have destroyed themselves. The cause for this female destruction of both Nel and Sula is their mother’s inability. Philip Page states that the lack of love between mother and daughter as, “although mother daughter relationships appear to lack closeness and love, they do so only in comparison to their children, they try to reshape them but there is no sense of love for these daughters” (48).

Their mother’s personal destruction has been passed on to their daughters as Helene Wright’s own mother prostituted her away out of her daughter’s heart. In order to set free herself from her “dirty”, Helene involve herself in reading the Bible and prays to God that she considers a good way of life, “(h)eavy hair is a bun, dark eyes arched in a perpetual query about other people’s manners” (Morrison 18). Her nature of her figure is just opposite to her own mother’s. She destroys that personality which expresses some kind of freedom and she sees this as a wrong way to live. By denying this part of who she is, good and bad, she denies completeness.

Morrison points the view of Helene, as “good” and her mother as “bad”. Though Helene is a church-going Christian, Rochelle points that she “stood by these sweeping hair up from her neck back into its halo-like roll, and wetting with spit the ringlets that fell over her ears” (Morrison 26). She looks beautiful not in

the Western ideal but comparing to her mother's appearance. This appearance shows some inner difference, and states that Helene is missing an essential part of herself; that is the angelic freedom, which her mother enjoys. Rochelle is, also missing the responsibility in her life, good and bad, neither her character is whole. So without "good" or "bad" the personality of both the female characters become extreme; and Rochelle is a whore and Helene is rigid.

Nel on the other hand cannot consider to be whole, because her mother forms complex personality that she might had. Nel befriends Sula, because the 'wild' and 'bad' element in Sula is denied by Nel's mother, "Her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had" (Morrison 83). The pressure placed on Nel, who burns out the chances of her finding true self, but she have little of her grandmother. Helene is also trying to reduce any chance for Nel's individuality. Morrison's sharp contrast makes it more obvious which is lacking in each character. Helene wants the righteousness and not the wild one, scenery from New Orleans surrounding her, but the unnatural scenery helps Nel to find her individuality:

She remembered clearly the urine running down and into her stockings until she learned how to squat funeral drums. It had been an exhilarating trip but a fearful one... she got out of bed and lit the lamp to look in the mirror. There was her face, plain brown eyes, three braids and the nose her mother hated. She looked for a long time and suddenly a shiver ran through her. "I'm me," she whispered. (Morrison 18).

Nel choose the first step to recognize a sense of self, and needs the tame and untamed life, to be complete. Nel, a female destructive character, continues to do because she will not be able to do beyond her mother. Her mother, Helene, tries to perfect Nel by:

"When Mrs Wright reminded to pull her nose, she would do it enthusiastically but without the least hope in the world.

"While you sittin' there, honey, go 'head and pull your nose".

"It hurts, Mama."

"Don't you want a nice nose when you grow up?" (Morrison 55).

Helene tries to bring the idea of Western beauty and reshapes her daughter, and she calls her out by the name with affectionately, "honey" (Morrison 56) which proves that her actions are because of the standards set out by the white community. Helene feels that she is helping her daughter by altering her daughter's appearance and teaching her with strict morals, which causes the female destruction. Nel has the opportunity by becoming whole; and Sula is the partner who cannot make her to whole.

Nel and Sula find a missing part at the early childhood, even before they meet each other, “they were solitary little girls whose loneliness was so profound it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into techno colored visions that always included a presence, a someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream” (Morrison 51).

This “someone” is their personality, which is washed away due to their influence of family. This “someone” can find the female a complete or wholeness if they realize who is bad and good. Sula is “bad”, that Helene Wright tries to implement in Nel, and Nel is ‘good’ which cannot be realized in Sula’s house. Nel finds comfort in Sula’s house, and Sula loves Nel’s house. Both find each other need for order and disorder, which is to be fulfilled. But their friendship does not serve as a compliment to Nel’s naturally reserved by putting her in a wild and bad environment.

When Nel begins her domestic life, her friendship with Sula dissolves. Morrison gives us a glance as to why this move away forms Sula a destructive: “living totally by the law and surrendering completely to it without questioning anything sometimes makes it impossible to know about yourself” (Step 14). As a housewife Nel washed out and follows what is expected of her, but she feels emptiness in her life. But Sula leaves and continues to live freely; “when [Nel] raised her eyes to him for one more look of reassurance, she saw through the open door a slim figure in blue gliding with just a hint of strut, down the path toward the road” (Morrison 85). The disappearance of Sula symbolizes the destruction in Nel’s complete self.

Sula is raised without discipline because her grandmother and mother led an incomplete life. Morrison, here creates three strong characters, as Trudier Harris states as: “Their breaks from expected codes of behavior also enables them to transcend the usual depiction of black women in African-American literature, thereby debunking numerous stereotypes and myths” (71). But, this is not complete because even with strength, the females destruct. Eva is a strong female character but she is physically weak. The missing of her leg makes emotional feelings, and incompleteness which has been passed to other female character in her family. Eva failed to show love to her family, which causes destruction to Hannah. Hannah tries to fulfill the life with a string of men, but she is unsuccessful in filling it. Eva is physically not perfect, but Hannah’s physical appearance is perfect. Like her mother, Hannah, sells a part of herself, so that she can be freed, but expecting for men, she feels her as bad:

Hannah exasperated the women in town... the “good” women, who said “one thing I can’t stand in nasty woman” ; the worse who were hard put to find trade among black men anyway and who resented Hannah’s generosity; the middling women, who had both husbands and affairs because

Hannah seemed too unlike them, having no passion attached to her relationships and being wholly incapable of jealousy” (Morrison 44).

Hannah feels that she cannot have the connection emotionally with men or women, and with her own daughter. She attempts daily to make her connection but she fails. Even though Hannah admits that she loves her daughter, she does not like her, and also she does not accept the love that she receives from her mother. Hannah pays no attention to her actions, to do with her daughter but in front of her, Hannah burns, which gives Sula a tool for destruction. Due to this Sula is never given a chance, because of her family’s actions and she is seen as only bad. Here Morrison points as:

“[A] woman who is an adventurer, who breaks rules, she can either be a criminal... which I was not interested in... or lead a kind of cabaret life... which I also was n’t interested in. But what about the women who doesn’t do any of that but nevertheless a rule-breaker, a kind of law-breaker, a lawless woman?” (Step 14).

Morrison creates the character which resembles as the Bad Nigger, as Bernard Bell explains that Bad Nigger as “a rebel against the social conventions and the status quo” and use[s] rebellion as an act of self-affirmation” (59-60). Morrison reworked on this character but this type of behavior is associated with black men, but not black women.

CONCLUSION

In *Sula* the protagonist Sula is raised in a house that simply disobeys the rules. The strict rules imposed on Nel is never mentioned in Sula’s household. As Helene’s mother is a prostitute, and Sula’s mother likes to have men in her life, she could not come out of this “bad” lifestyle. So, Sula learns it as an advantage, and as her mother does, Sula also involves in sexual activity which leads her for the destruction. Before this sexual activity, Sula finds completion with Nel. So both benefits their company and form a bond that seems an independent lifestyle which leads to the female destruction. Morrison’s characters recognize what they need, and both themselves without any completeness. In their completeness both realized their good and evil and they understand this in the end, which adds to their destruction. This destruction passes from their mother to daughter shows a continuous cycle and it happens till the female realize by themselves, that they are destroying themselves and their community.

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