

A Study of Men-Women Relationship in the Selected Novels of Toni Morrison

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Abstract

Toni Morrison is the most sophisticated novelist in the recent times in the history of African American literature who became an accomplished writer and wrote with her own mode of literary representation. She is awakened and conscious about women's life and problems and believes that feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of specific contradiction in the existing social order. There is a comprehensive portrayal of man-woman relationship in Morrison's novels. She speaks of what it was in the past in America, and how it extended to the modern times without much change. The African American society comes out from the slave era. It was identified that as long as they were slaves, there was the emasculation of the men. As a result, the readers find the vicious treatment of women in the man-woman relationships. Man-woman relationship is as old as human survival. That man-woman relationship forms a major theme in most of her novels. It can be seen from the numerical index. All her novels taken up for study reveal the varied phases of men-women relationship; marital, premarital, and extra-marital. This paper intends to discuss the complete study of men – women relationships and its impact on her novels.

Keywords: Tony Morrison, men-women relationships, social disorder, feminism, male chauvinism, emasculation of men, oppression of women

Man-woman relationship is as old as human survival. Earlier it was a biological need. The contemporary complexity of it is an adding up of culture. It is a manifestation of existence, which figures as the central part in literature. Since the beginning, literary venture has been to represent this relationship along with its concomitants, and to bring out the misfortune or otherwise ensuing from it. Fiction, the most attributive and prevailing outward appearance of literary term in modern times, as well axis on it.

The ever-changing reality of life inevitably reflects itself in literature and Morrison's novels are no exception with her depiction of man-woman relationship. Like other novelists, she too explores the tensions and pretensions in this area of life. That man-woman relationship forms a major theme in her novels. It can be seen from the numerical index. All her novels taken up for study here reveal the varied phases of man-woman relationship; marital, premarital, and extra-marital.

Toni Morrison is the most sophisticated novelist in the recent times in the history of African American literature, who became an accomplished writer and wrote with her own mode of literary

representation. She shows a deep insight into the racial problems that are being confronted by the Blacks since their existence. Being an African-American woman, Morrison boldly presents Afro-American feminist consciousness through her literary endeavor where she strongly expresses her philosophy as a feminist. She is awakened and conscious about women's life and problems and believes that feminist consciousness is the experience in a certain way of specific contradiction in the existing social order. As a result, her novels manifest and highlight Black women who are doubly harassed at the level of male standards and poverty, as well as at different levels of Euro-American women's standards.

There is a comprehensive portrayal of man-woman relationship in Morrison's novels. She speaks of what it was in the past in America, and how it extended to the modern times without much change. She describes how superstitions and infidelity affected conjugal relationships. As a novelist with a keen observation of life, she analyses the reasons for happy and unhappy marital lives. With the keen insight of a psychologist, she portrays pre-marital and extra-marital relationships, and shows sex as the primary instinct in man-woman relationships. She has a clear and correct understanding of the working of the masculine and feminine mind. She portrays the frivolous attitude of the man who casts away women like worn-out shoes in the presence of new ones. She shows that man is not able to fathom the mysteries of the feminine mind. She wants man not to consider women merely as a means for the release of sexual energy.

The African American society has come out from the slave era. It was identified that as long as they were slaves, there was the constant emasculation of the black men. As a result, the readers find the vicious treatment of women in the man-woman relationship among the African - American people. Most of the critics propose that the women's helplessness seems to have been accentuated by, or associated with intimidation, or the denial of the manhood of the male slave. It is rather expected that many female writers can set the genuine tone for the male voice in their storylines. Female writers are the supporters for the rational depiction of man-woman relationships.

Before casting light on the man-woman relationship, it is essential to explore the nature of various characters in the novel. Beloved stands out as the channel for the transformation of Sethe, Paul D, Denver, and the community. She is the ghost and re-embodiment of Sethe's older daughter, who was assassinated by her mother to keep the child out of slavery. Annoyed over what has occurred to her, Beloved persistently irritates and dislocates Sethe's household. When Paul D drives her out of the house as an infant ghost, she comes back as a female who targets consuming Sethe. By the end of the novel, Beloved 'rests for the storehouse of the aching times of yore' of African Americans.

Sethe is Morrison's paradoxical character. She is also the quintessence female slave: appeasing the desires of her children; adhering to the governing powers of her white masters. She is so loyal, in fact, that she receives a gift from the mistress of Sweet Home, "a present from the lady I worked for." (*Beloved* 58) Paul D Garner is the last surviving male amongst the slaves from Sweet Home Plantation. While at Sweet Home, he runs after Sethe and was depressed when she preferred Halle for her husband instead of him. Subsequent to runaway slavery and a chain-gang prison camp, he roamed for years, lastly arriving at Bluestone Road to turn out to be Sethe's lover after the eighteen-year parting. When he finds out that she murdered her oldest

daughter, he absconds and goes away from Sethe; however, later he returns to lend a hand to her to find wholeness.

Schoolteacher is the widower of Mr. Garner's sister. He possesses the Sweet Home Plantation after Mr. Garner dies. As master of the slaves, he treats them no better than animals. When he receives news of what his nephews have done to Sethe, he does nothing to rebuke them. When he holds Sixo after his fleeing, he burns him to death. When Sethe escapes, he travels to Cincinnati to bring her back to Sweet Home and provides the inspiring strength for Sethe to murder her daughter and endeavor to take the life of her other children. Sethe could not bear the consideration of her babies being slaves under Schoolteacher.

There are other minor characters. Buglar and Howard are Sethe's sons, who leave home after Sethe tries to kill them and Baby Suggs dies. Lillian Garner is the wife of Mr. Garner, the owner of Sweet Home. She is a hard worker and endeavors to treat the slaves on the plantation fairly; but she will not permit Sethe to have a wedding, thinking it unfortunate. She does, however, give her a pair of crystal earrings as a marriage gift. Overcome by poor health and an incapability to run the plantation, she brings School teacher, her cruel brother-in-law, to run Sweet Home.

Edward Bodwin is a white abolitionist living in Cincinnati, Ohio. He works for the Underground Railroad and lets Baby Suggs live in his old family home in return for her labor. He also saves Sethe from being hanged for the crime of killing her daughter. Miss Bodwin is the sister to Edward Bodwin. She visits Sethe and gives her gifts and helps Denver to come out of her shell. Nan is a one-armed slave woman whose accountability is the nursing and care of the children of the slave-holders and the slaves. She thinks about Sethe when she was a small child and tries to tell Sethe about her mother, who was on the same slave ship as Nan.

The present novel is about women, which marshals the description of bravery in the African American fictional world with keeping a unique focal point on the man-woman relationship. The major thrust of this is that Morrison employs Beloved to demonstrate, to explore and explicate the complication of man-woman relationship.

In a very forceful way, the agonizing element of the many ways black women's bodies were "scarred and dismembered by slavery and then salvaged and remembered in the acts of free love" (Andersen 102) It is about a love relationship that vanished, twisted between mother and daughter. Women as mothers had the furthermost mental propellent within the American slave culture. The practice, which deprived the women of the prospect and opportunity of loving their children, only tended to set them against their children. The type of love relationship between mother and daughter in this novel is moreover indicative of the unusualness and intricacy of Morrison's art. It is a novel on the subject of women, which drums up the descriptive form of intrepidness in the African American fictional world, keeping the extraordinary meeting point on the man-woman relationship.

Within the past border of American slave culture, Morrison portrays the ability for destructive love from a historical truth. Sethe Suggs' love for her children is "tough and she back now." (*Beloved* 200) She strives to validate her deed by making believe that there is just no substitute to what she does: "How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something

I could not bear to happen to her.” (B *Beloved* 200) The novelist appears to support Sethe’s attitude toward the infanticide. However, afterward in the novel, the writer looks as if she should not disregard the infanticide, as she also depicts the vengeance that such ugliness precedes.

On the part of Beloved, love means revenge. The conviction inspires Sethe’s optimism that Beloved would come back to her: “I knew she would be. Paul D ran her off and she had no choice but to come back to me in the flesh. I bet you Baby Suggs, on the other side, helped.” (*Beloved* 20) On her second coming, Beloved ratifies a ‘spiteful retaliation’ for her death. Her brutal aim is discovered by Denver in the Clearing when Beloved almost throttles Sethe. Denver in addition appreciates that Beloved has come back to get faithful compensation from her mother. As a result, Beloved’s love in this novel is special in a way from that of her mother and more obviously that of Denver. It is interesting that to save Sethe from the stranglehold of Beloved, would involve the agreement of a loveless move forward recommended by Paul D; “Don’t love her too much. Don’t.” (*Beloved* 206) They must accept the dangerous love of a free person with the help of the community previously rejected by Sethe because of her arrogance and egotism. It is on the bases of the higher than milieu type of love in Morrison’s *Beloved*, that we now read the text from Melanie Klein’s viewpoint to settle on whether Sethe’s action could ever be necessary and what her impetus was. We will attempt to identify the psychological structure of the human characters in the novel, which provoked them to convinced actions. We are set to also travel around to see how these psychological basics unite with outside features to result in the ultimate heartbreak acts displayed by the protagonists in the novel.

An essential principle is that human beings are ambitious to shape relationships with others; and the relationships breakdown before they have had time to shape into victorious ones, pointing to troubles afterward. As the child is nourished, it is satisfied when the breast fabricates enough milk, in which case the child is loved and esteemed. When the child is ahead of time inhibited, or the breast fails to produce adequate milk or food, the child is disturbed; the breast is abhorrent and grows to be the beneficiary of antagonistic thoughts. This is the foundation for the schizoid and depressive location, which Klein formulates in analyzing the child’s psychology and subsequent adult behaviour. It makes clear in the mind the stance of love and hate of the child towards the mother.

Sethe Suggs (*Beloved*’s mother) is a mother whose bond with her own mother was detached by slavery. She does not even expend a divided individual or identity previous to this division occurs. It is hard consequently for her to recognize the boundary between her and another. As a result, she “didn’t know where the world stopped and she began.” (B 164) This means that she has not become full-grown into subject-hood. As a result, Sethe is still in her pre-oedipal symbiotic point when its grotesque self has to take charge of how she reacts with her mother and immediate surroundings. These details move her forcefully. Nonetheless, she must find a surrogate mother to totally experience the circle and take for granted her partisanship. This is in addition at the origin of Sethe’s incapability to disconnect herself from her daughter, and accordingly, be accountable for the strong love she has for her daughter. Therefore, her love develops into the consequence of the supremacy of the un-separable mother.

When Beloved goes through to sexual relations with Paul D, it is for the reason of bringing back and keeping Sethe for herself rather than growing into adulthood. Her immature reliance and

remaining company in the pre-oedipal stage is protracted and it pays for her the chance to smother her mother with her eccentric kind of ‘sick’ love. Beloved consequently undermines the whole quintessence of compensation, for the reason that she does not re-unite with her mother in a transforming, life-giving, and supporting type of love. And when the women of the community rally round to drive Beloved away and set free Sethe from the strangle-hold of death, it is for the reason of the excellence of the African American women of all time being there for one another. This culture of female bonding turns out to be the abiding quality to one additional instance of a mother/daughter relationship in African America society, illustrated by anxiety, disgust and destructiveness.

Morrison’s novel *Jazz* presents us with the issue of romantic love and desire against the backdrop of man-woman relationship. It puts that problem up as a battle for both self-identity and recognition. She also succeeds, casting light on feminism. In this novel, Violet is a strong character and alone, an unusual woman whose years of adversity ending, catching up with her at the age of fifty-six. She moves up to be by her mother, Rose Dear, in Vienna, Virginia, was one of five children. Her father would leave the family for long stretches of time and when the family’s property was retrieved, Violet’s mother had committed suicide by throwing herself down a well. When Violet had married Joe Trace, she had sought to get away from the hard-knocks lifestyle of her childhood by moving to the City. Neither she nor Joe had wanted children, other than as Violet grew older, she began to experience a profound desire far too incredible to love. Her relationship with Joe developed into stress when she fell into despair. When she found out that Joe had cheated on her with Dorcas, Violet poured out all of her irritation, grief and annoyance into a final act of slitting Dorcas’s face at her funeral as she lay in her open coffin. In the months that followed, Violet looked for peace and longed to heal herself and her marriage, ascertaining, finally, that she had to ‘make it’ by taking ownership of her contentment and declining to be a wounded person.

The novel gives us proof, on the other hand, of how love and positive response cannot be appreciated by yourself, of one’s interior self, or one’s community setting. The trouble with love is the difficulty created by the interference of insensible psychosomatic self as well as the outside public circumstance. Morrison’s effort to unveil the truth that both men and women, because of their human nature, have an analogous impetus and budding familiarity to love, this competence is doused by a dissimilarity in gender, and this complication is further aggravated by culture and socialization. Therefore, this novelist displays through her characters that for African-Americans living in a racist, post-slavery society which seems to refuse them their status as human beings, the union of love is repeatedly forged through the repression of authority and dislocation of the self. Centering on this problem of the dislocation of the personality in the novel, Morrison, in a recent interview, exposed the query that she had most exclusively in mind as she marked *Jazz* that grew to be the influential stimulus for this novel. She affirmed that she wondered ‘What is it that compels a good woman to displace the self, herself?’ Romantic love, Morrison’s novel suggests, may be the source of this displacement of the female self. As Felice clarifies when she and Dorcas used to make up love scenes and describe them to each other: “It was fun and a little smutty. Something about it bothered me though. Not the loving stuff, but the picture I had of myself when I did it. Nothing like me.” (*Jazz* 208-09)

The ever-changing authenticity of life unavoidably imitates itself in literatures. All Morrison’s novels at this time expose the wide-ranging segment of man-woman relationship -

marital, premarital, and extra-marital. A close study of Morrison's novels - not a chronological one, reveals the state of man-woman relationship as it existed in America. This was a male-dominated society as far as this relationship goes, and this problem is prevalent even today in most of the world's communities, including the Indian situation. The burden of chastity and seclusion was put on the women, while men enjoyed the freedom of permissiveness. They considered women as creatures for their delectation. This attitude of man towards woman is revealed very well in her fiction.

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