Daughters of Distanced Mothers: The Quest of Selfhood in Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973) and the Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of maternal loss in Toni Morrison's Sula (1973) and Alice Walker's the Color Purple (1982). Maternal loss, in this paper, refers to the disconnection between Black mothers and their daughters. This disconnection leads these daughters to establish a bonding that may replace the lost mother-daughter bonding and promote their search for selfhood. Celie, The Color Purple's protagonist, forges a very intimate relationship with Shug, and Sula and Nel, the protagonists in Sula become exceptionally attached. More precisely, this paper sheds light on the way the women's bonding enable them to survive maternal loss and androcentric and racial biases as well as sustain their quest of selfhood.

Keywords

maternal loss, mother-daughter bonding, Black Womanhood, selfhood.

Résumé

Cet article explore l'impact de la perte maternelle dans Sula de Toni Morrison (1973) et The Colour Purple (1982) d'Alice Walker. La perte maternelle, dans cet article, fait référence à la déconnexion entre les mères noires et leurs filles. Cette déconnexion conduit ces filles à établir un lien qui peut remplacer le lien mère-fille perdu et favoriser leur recherche de l'individualité. Celie, le protagoniste de The Color Purple, forge une relation très intime avec Shug, et Sula et Nel, les protagonistes

de Sula deviennent exceptionnellement attachés. Plus précisément, cet article met en lumière la manière dont les liens entre les femmes leur permettent de survivre à la perte maternelle et aux préjugés androcentriques et raciaux, ainsi que de soutenir leur quête d'individualité.

Mots clés

perte maternelle, lien mère-fille, féminité noire, identité.

It is no surprise that famous Black feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Angela Davis, and many others have devoted their works to denounce the social, historical, and economic injustices affecting black women in general and black motherhood in particular. The worst distortion afflicting black motherhood is the disconnection between mothers and their children. Back to the early history of America and more precisely to the era when the social and economic life in America relied heavily on slavery, black motherhood was appallingly controlled and misshaped. Treated badly, forced to hard labour, and often raped, black women ended up separated symbolically and literally from their own children. Even after the abolition of slavery, black mothers and their children were subject to other forms of psychological and physical abuse.

Though early African American women writers wrote slave narratives and autobiographies not only to record their suffering but also to denounce the cruel and atrocious practices they suffered from as slaves, the black woman and the black mother representations in literature

have remained distorted for a long time. After slavery, racial and patriarchal representations reduced black womanhood in general and black motherhood in particular into reductive and even demeaning stereotypes. Not only because black mothers were often referred to as the Mammy, the Matriarch, or the Welfare mother[3], but also because of the various social, cultural and economic challenges, black motherhood proves to be a challenging task. Consequently, a distorted relationship between black mothers and their children becomes prevalent. The latter has its dire repercussions both on mothers and their children. While black mothers feel oppressed and dominated as well as emotionally and physically crippled, their children become confused and mislead. This maternal loss breeds more upcoming disoriented and easily dominated black generations. It is this dire state of affairs that spurs many black women writers, in particular, to write about black motherhood and maternal loss.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison's *Sula* are examples of the many works written by African American women writers tackling black motherhood and maternal loss. Both novels explore the

[3] See Patricia Hills Collins, 2nd ed. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. Routledge, 2000,p.266.

impact of maternal loss on the female protagonists of the novels. The continuous struggle of black mothers to survive the various oppressions often results in an emotionally faint and distant mother-daughter relationship. Lacking any bond or attachment to their mothers, the protagonists are initially lost, then resort to establish a bonding that may supplant their maternal loss and promote their search for selfhood. As such, the black daughters become forced not only to learn to survive but most importantly to fulfil their quest of selfhood with no mother they can identify with. Along their journey, the female protagonists establish intimate relationships with other women in the novels. Celie, *The Color Purple*'s protagonist forges a very intimate relationship with Shug, and Sula and Nel, the protagonists in *Sula*, become exceptionally attached. Their relationships enable them to survive the maternal loss, the androcentric, and racial biases, as well as sustain their quest of selfhood. While Walker presents a more optimistic and stout vision of female bonding, Morrison depicts a fluctuant and a relatively less successful female bonding.

Starting with *The Color Purple*, one can easily discern that the mother-daughter bond is absent in the novel. Despite the fact that Celie's mother, during Celie's childhood, was alive, the mother-daughter bond has never existed between the two. Her mother, who is never named in the novel and who is barely present physically, is never emotionally present for her daughters. After all,

Celie's mother cannot be blamed for that absence because her mind was never able to recover after the lynching of her innocent husband. While she plunged in a deep grief for her husband's death, "the neighbors…shunned her more and more… because her attachment to the past was pitiful"(Walker 181). At the mean time, a stranger appeared and married her. Every year, she was pregnant, weaker, and more mentally disturbed until she dies. Consequently, due to her mental unrest, Celie's mother never performed her role as a "good-enough mother" (Winnicot 10). She was neither able to create a strong relationship with her daughters nor provide guidance to her daughters to form a "True Self" (Winnicot 10).

While the state of Celie's mother mirrors a facet of the appalling racial injustices and their impact on black motherhood on the one hand, it does depict the crucial role of the black mother in fashioning or at least guiding her daughter(s) towards self-fulfilment. In that, Daniel Ross explains that a person, especially a daughter, shapes his/her identity through the identification with someone else usually the mother- an essential entity that Celie lacks during her childhood (77). Deprived of a nurturing mother in her childhood, Celie spends a long part of her life as a submissive and powerless woman.

It is not only Celie who feels the absence of her mother but her stepfather also did. Thus, he wanted

someone to fill his wife's shoes, and he found Celie who would do what her mother could not do (Walker 11). Ironically, Celie was operating in the place of her mother; taking care of her mother, brothers, and her stepfather. Because of her mother's absence, Celie's stepfather abuses her. Being untutored and oppressed, the continued rape of her stepfather, her two pregnancies, and the unfitting role Celie was acting out devours any sense of a nascent identity.

Owing to Celie's mother's failure to pass on ethos of self-sufficiency, autonomy and defiance, Instead of revolting against her stepfather's cruelty and pursuing a new life based on independence and self-assertiveness, Celie wishes to have a new life with another man. Just like her mother who could not live without her deceased husband and who chooses to marry again instead of being determined to survive and save her children, Celie wishes to marry and have children in order to escape her stepfather's viciousness.

Ama Ata Aidoo in her play *Anowa* says that "someone should have taught me how to be a woman" (qtd. In Davies 68). In *The Color Purple*, It is Shug Avery, the mistress of Celie's husband, who teaches Celie how to be a woman. Shug's significance for Celie is not limited to a mere fascination or admiration, but to a one of emulation and learning. Shug replaces Celie's absent mother and becomes an enabling maternal figure

who propagates influential female bonding values. It is this bonding that "enables Celie_ a depressed survivor-victim of parent loss, emotional and physical neglect, rape, incest, trauma, and spousal abuse- to resume her arrested development and continue developmental processes that were thwarted in infancy and early adolescence" (Proudfit 13).

Shug, appears to be modeled after the black "maternal ancestors" in the way she "nurtured and shaped" Celie (Christian, "Alice Walker" 470). Once Shug arrives, she starts "intercepting the world, conferring unconditional approval, regulating the environment, supplying missing psychic elements, and mirroring certain aspects of the self" just to teach Celie how to fight (Ruth and Brownley 5). Shug, in fact, represents the "good-enough mother" for Celie that Donald. W Winnicott identifies as a primary factor for the formation of a stable selfhood. She edifies Celie gradually just like a mother does with her baby, leading Celie to speak out her mind, putting herself as a model, asking Celie to act in a specific manner, and finally leaving her when being sure that her mission is done. She insures her telling her: "Girl, you on your way" when she felt that Celie is progressing (Walker 188).

Because of the absence of the maternal mother figure and the assaults of her stepfather and her husband, Celie, before the coming of Shug, plunges in a deep state

of remorse, blame, and silence. She suffers from what Leonard Shengold labels a "soul, or psychic murder" (Shengold 24-25). He describes "soul murder" as a terrible and overwhelming experience to the extent that the individual "resorts to massive isolation of feeling... . A hypnotic living deadness, a state of existing "as if" one were there…" (Shengold 24-25). This is exactly the case of Celie who is extremely submissive, detached and emotionless especially towards her oppressor. One example of this state is what happens with Celie each time her husband Mr.___ asks her to bring him his belt to punish her. Celie explains: "It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree" (Walker 30). In fact, this passivity and withholding of emotions stand as a survival strategy that Celie resorts to because she has no possibility of manifesting her anger or expressing herself. She reflects on her state saying that "I think? I can't even remember the last time I felt mad, I say… Then after a while every time I got mad, or start feel mad, I got sick. Felt like throwing up. Terrible feeling, Then I start to feel nothing at all" (Walker 47).

While performing her mothering role, Shug intends to break Celie's silence. She starts to question Celie about how things go with her husband and her stepfather. For the first time, Celie speaks to someone about what happened and is still happening to her. Celie, in a moment of frenzy, speaks about the entire ordeal she has gone through:

> It hurt me, you know, I say. I was just going on fourteen. I never even thought bout men having down there so big. ….After he through, I start to cry…My mama die…My sister Nettie run away. Mr.___ come and git me to take care his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. Nobody ever love me. (Walker 108-109)

As if under a spell, Celie remembers every horrible and tiny detail of her mother's passivity, her stepfather and husband's savagery, and her feeling of loneliness and repudiation. Determined to mend Celie from the "soul murder" she suffers from, Shug succeeds to make Celie speak, feel the pain and withstand it, and above all experience a sensation of relief. "It was also in this bedroom scene that the two women become lovers…. After unburdening herself with words and tears, and unable consciously to recall the love of her preoedipal parents" (Proudfit 26), Celie says "Nobody ever loves me". Shug, astonished and impressed by Celie's endurance, found herself but condoling with her asking her not to cry, kissing her, and assuring her that she loves her. Then, Celie describes the scene: "And then [Shug] haul off and kiss me on the mouth. Then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my lost babies mouth" (Walker 109). This first sexual contact, though generating jouissance, is more of a psychological significance. Celie's feeling of pleasure, ultimately, is not just a sort of regeneration; rather, it can

be interpreted as an initiation into the new world of affection and tenderness similar to the pleasure and comfort that the child finds in the contact with his mother (Ross 72). According to Andrienne Rich "the lesbian experience is like motherhood". It is "a profoundly female experience, with particular meanings, and potentials" (Rich 24). Similarly, Celie explains that her relationship with Shug generates compassion and comfort; "It feel like heaven this is what it feel like", Celie explains (Walker 110).

Breaking Celie's silence and enabling her to be loved are initial phases in making Celie able to face and challenge her oppressors. Before the coming of Shug, Celie used to write letter to record her living and her suffering. Though writing is not in itself a manifestation of liberation, it is a means that facilitates her ultimate emancipation used when all else fails. Shug, however, relocates Celie from the silent and unproductive act of writing letters to the interactive act of speech. It is only when Shug told Celie that Mr.___ was hiding Nettie's letters that Celie ceases to be silent. When discovering that her husband prevented her from her communicating with her sister, an audacious voice emerges enabling Celie to abruptly subvert her husband's tyrannical control over her.

The magical expression that metamorphoses Celie's life is "I curse you" (Walker 187). When cursing

her husband, she is, in fact, rejuvenating her ancestors' voodoo. It is believed that the latter is a practice, chiefly, used by helpless women to empower themselves, punish their enemy, and restore order and justice (Colton 35). At the moment of the curse, Celie says that she was not herself connoting that she was haunted by her ancestors' spirits. Through them, she discerns and uses the power of words over the world. It is this understanding of the complexity of the world and the immense injustices that allow Celie to rise up. It is only when following Shug's teachings that "Celie is able to conjure up more than words-words that can activate the power of her new interconnected, more African world view- and throw them at Mister" (Colton 37).

Believing that Celie's liberation is the result of various and intricate factors, Shug insists also on liberating her from traditional Christianity (Humm 184). Shug seems to believe that "It is Celie's strict adherence to traditional Christianity to God…Which keeps her locked in the cycle of male jurisdiction" (Hankinson 322). Celie believed that God was the only one that could help her. Thus, in times of distress and grief, she returns to God imploring his help through her letters. Unfortunately, God never responds. Recognizing her distorted vision, Celie later explains: "the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgitful, and lowdown" (Walker 175). Consequently, Shug responds to her

explicating that one should have a personal image and conceptualization of God because it "ain't a he or a she but a It" (Walker 177). Shug's concept of God makes Celie realize that love, freedom, and admiration of the beauty of the world form the essence of life. Thus, Celie casts away that patriarchal god and turns to admire nature and life. In her last letter, Celie writes, "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God" revealing her new religious belief (Walker 249). Interestingly, Stacie Lynn Hankinson comments on Celie's new religion maintaining that "When Shug teaches Celie that God is in everything…and God is in her, and she is inherently connected to everything (203), … Celie's newfound religion links God with the power of the universe, a very pantheistic notion, and often associated with godess religion…, a concept that defies any sense of hierarchal structure" (Hankinson 327).

Besides the psychological and religious changes, Shug continues to anchor Celie in consummating her self-fulfilment and self-determination through economic independence. In Order to help Celie get on her feet, Shug took Celie to her "big and pink house in Memphis" (Walker 188). By doing so, Shug "provides Celie with a literal and psychological womblike "holding environment" in which Celie flourishes" (Proudfit 27). And instead of leaving Celie kill her husband with a razor, Shug acts as "an auxiliary ego" for Celie (Proudfit

27), and offers Celie's insightful and overpowering moral "A needle and not a razor in my hand…" (Walker 137).

To emphasize her autonomy, dethronement, and challenge of the patriarchal norms, Celie chooses to make pants for both men and women, though the standards at these times were classifying pants as being for men. Being jovial with what she has attained, Celie writes to Nettie: "Dear Nettie, I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends, and time"(Walker 193).

Imbued with confidence, Celie asseverates, "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly …But I'm here" (Walker 187). Ultimately, Celie is able to disengage herself from oppression and assert her selfhood only when she turns her back on her maternal loss relying on Shug's advice and guidance, accepting herself for what she is, recognizing her talents, and challenging her oppressors. Shug's mission is consummated. She applauds Celie's success telling her:"Girl, you on your way" (Walker 188). "Shug can part from Celie, knowing that, like a good mother, she has done all what she could to provide an environment of love and security so Celie can stand on her own feet. Celie has learned that with or without Shug, she is now enough of a woman that she can survive on her own" (Dieke 63).

Unlike Celie who successfully survives maternal loss and who is anchored all along her quest of selfhood by Shug, Sula and Nel, experience a more vacillating

journey. Due to the intensity of the hegemonic forces and their immaturity, Sula and Nel's maternal loss has a devastating impact on their lives. Growing up with a deep sense of loss, abandonment and even rejection hampers Sula and Nel's search for self-fulfilment.

The fact of coming of totally different backgrounds makes Sula and Nel cling more and more to each other. Maggie Galehouse's reading of *Sula* asserts that "the friendship between Sula and Nel makes *Sula* a feminist novel in which the two women complement or complete one another, generating two halves of a personality that combine to form a whole psyche" (350). More importantly, their relationship provides them with a chance to forge a new self assembling both of their personalities to brazen out the failed mother-daughter relationships they suffer from during their childhood, and to compensate for their mothers' deviant and extreme natures. Both girls suffer from the fact that their mothers never act as proper role models; While Nel's mother is too authoritative and conformist, Sula's mother is too unconventional and libertine. "Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers, they found in each other's eyes intimacy they were looking for" (Morrison 51).

After all, Sula and Nel's mothers themselves suffered from maternal loss. Helene, Nel's mother, never established a real bond with her mother. Because her

mother was a prostitute, Helene contradictiously yearns for her mother's love but hates who she is and does her best not to resemble her. Her maternal loss and continuous attempts to erase her maternal legacy and past cripple her from performing her role as a mother. Helene grows up to be very conventional and conservative adopting the values and codes of her society and insisting to dispatch them forcibly to her daughter. Being afraid that Nel may inherit her grandmother's immoral conduct, Helene imposes onerous rules that make Nel compliant and inert. Any enthusiasm or passion demonstrated by Nel "were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (Morrison 18). It is no surprise that "during all of her girlhood the only respite Nel had had from her stern and undemonstrative parents was Sula" (Morrison 72). All in all, it was Nel who paid the price of the "matrilineal line that suffers from an Eve/ Mary bedrock of feminine duality, the whore/Madonna polarity" (Demetrakopoulos 79).

Sula's mother, Hannah, and even her grandmother, however, are extremely free and unconventional vis-à-vis the social codes and morals starting with their vision about relationships with men to the way they raise Sula. It is by no means an exaggeration if one says that Sula was not even raised by her mother, but grew on her own. "Neither Eva nor Hannah", Wilfred Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems argue, "served as a positive role model who enforced or

exhibited a lifestyle of domestic tranquillity or security" for Sula (36). In fact, Sula suffered mainly from her mother's unconcern and apathy towards her. When seeing the way her mother cared about her lovers, Sula knew that she will never receive any guidance, love or attention by her mother.

Being suffocated by the imposed social codes or being neglected and abandoned without any set of ethics or values, both girls find what they lack in each other: self-determination and nurturing care. Similarly, Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek explain that "the friendship between Sula and Nel in many ways nurtures both girls by supplying the lacks in their mother-daughter relationships" (40). Sula and Nel's relationship is so magical in the way it generates solace, strength, safety, and constancy. Due to the pain caused by her mother's rejection, Sula plunges in deep sadness and sorrow, but Nel's presence is enough to restore Sula's happiness. The narrator explains: "She [Sula] only heard Hannah's words, and the pronouncement sent her flying up the stairs. In bewilderment, she stood at the window fingering the curtain edge, aware of a sting in her eye. Nel's call floated up and into the window, pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" (Morrison 57). Sula, on the other hand, helps Nel to deal with and confront her oppressive mother. The relationship that exists between the two girls proves to be

"the most important relationship in their lives" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 44).

While their mothers fail to guide them or help them fashion a stout sense of selfhood, Sula and Nel's friendship generates confidence, security, and above all new visions about selfhood in the midst of their domineering society. An instance of that is the incident of the train that occurs during Nel's trip with her mother to New Orleans. Unlike the manipulative and strong attitude she has always seen in her mother, Nel for the first time sees that her mother is so weak. While entering the part reserved for the whites in the train, Nel's mother is humiliated both by the bus driver and the black soldiers who were there. Nel, once seeing that scene, "…resolved to be on guard-always. She wanted to make certain that no man ever looked at her that way" (Morrison 13). For the first time, Nel realizes the difficulty of being a black woman in a male dominated and racist society. Consequently, she becomes aware of the importance of shaping her identity away from the mother's authority and useless regulations. In that, she asserts: "'I'm me,' she whispered. 'Me.' Nel didn't quite know what she meant, but on the other hand she knew exactly what she meant. I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me'"(Morrison 26). In order to fulfil her quest for freedom, Nel thinks seriously of leaving the town. "Leaving Medallion would be her goal. But that was before she met Sula, the girl she had seen

for five years at Garfield Primary but never played with, never knew, because her mother said that Sula's mother was sooty. The trip, perhaps, or her new found me-ness, gave her the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother" (Morrison 28).

This new found me-ness is, also, crystal clear in the way Nel declines her mother's directives about reshaping her nose and straightening her hair. Suffering from an identity crisis, Nel's mother blames her for her black skin, flat and big nose, and crimped hair and tries to change them according to white standards. Fortunately, "after she met Sula, Nel slid the clothespin under the blanket as soon as she got in the bed. And although there was still the hateful hot comb to suffer through each Saturday evening, its consequences – smooth hair- no longer interested her" for she finally has found Sula who accepts and loves her the way she is (Morrison 55). Interestingly, "Sula's preservation of her self allows Nel to limn boundaries between herself and her mother" (Gillespie and Kubitschek 41).

While Sula delivers Nel from her mother's tyranny, Nel provides Sula with the support and protection she has always lacked. An instance of that is when Nel shared the responsibility of killing Chicken Little and keeping her friend's secret. Nel stashes away the social morals about right and wrong in order to prove her loyalty to Sula. Even after the incident and during the

boy's funeral, the two girls felt very comfortable and relaxed because they have confidence in each other and their growing solidarity. "By providing Sula and Nel with the secret of Chicken Little's accidental death, and specifically by having Nel provide the strength and support Sula needed at the moment, Morrison further united them in a manner that would bond them for eternity. Although the action was Sula's, the involvement... was clearly theirs together" (Samuels and Hudson-Weems 45). Nel and Sula are sure that this incident will always remain their shared secret. The narrator describes the scene of Sula and Nel during the funeral: "Nel and Sula stood some distance away from the grave, the space that had sat between them in the pews had dissolved. They held hands and knew that only the coffin would lie in the earth; the bubbly laughter and the press of fingers in the palm would stay above ground forever" (Morrison 66).

Chicken Little's death is of a paramount importance for Sula because it does not only strengthen her bonding with Nel, but also because it permits her to mull over some significant memories again. One of these memories is when Sula hears her mother saying that she does not like her. This event, in fact, "taught her there was no other" she can count on since her own mother does not like her. Her mother's attitude towards her suffused her with scepticism and distrust (Morrison 117). Hannah's deceptive posture creates a confusion in Sula's

developing sense of selfhood leaving her daughter with "no center, no peck around which to grow" (Morrison 118). But after Nel's protective and supportive attitude during the incident of Chicken Little, Sula disregards her mother's words and realizes that she can rely on Nel.

Despite their strong relationship, Sula and Nel have to be separated taking two different paths. Sula decides to go to college and carry on her quest of self-fulfilment and freedom, and Nel decides to get married and have a family. Sula and Nel's friendship soon goes to wrack and ruin because of Sula and Jude's affair. Unlike during their childhood and even adolescence where they could create their own world away from external forces, once adults Sula and Nel's friendship is affected by the sullying impact of the intersectional social and gender forces.

While Nel thought that marriage may give her a feeling of contentment and peace, it just distances her from her friend Sula and thus from herself. Nel's marriage with Jude disrupts her pursuit of self-understanding. Nel's progress after marriage halts while performing matrimonial and social obligations becoming one of the women with husbands who "had folded themselves into starched coffins, their sides bursting with other people's skinned dreams and bony regrets… Those with men had had the sweetness sucked from their breath by overns and steam kettles" (Morrison 122).

"She[Nel]ends up harassed by the community's supreme morals about good and evil that lead to her separation from Sula- her only savior"(McDowell 56).

As if to blame Sula or herself, Nel isolates herself, stops talking to Sula, and devotes herself to raising her children. Her excessive love for her children was like "bear love" (Morrison 119). It was, in Gillespie and Kubitschek words, "destructive because of its dishonesty" (21). Her love for her children "…enables Nel to evade her responsibilities toward understanding her own experience; consequently she preserves an immature and incomplete saintly self-image based on a denial of her real self" (21). In order to preserve her saintly self-image, Nel represses all her needs and urges resulting in the formulation of a gray ball of fur that she insists on ignoring. "It was so nice to think about their [her children's] scary dreams and not about a bal of fur…It just floated there for the seeing, if she wanted…But she didn't want to see it" (Morrison 94).

Because Nel is good enough to be the only person in town willing to visit Sula, she goes to talk to her in her deathbed. Even while dying, Sula never ceases to impel Nel towards self-fulfilment and rejection of social conventions. In attempt to free her friend from the lie of the saintly self-image and from the gray ball of fur that feeds on Nel's repression, Sula tells her: "'About who was good. How you know it was you? . . . I mean maybe

it wasn't you. Maybe it was me'" (Morrison 126). By asking this question, Sula, on the one hand, queries the social categorizations and stereotypes, and on the other, imparts Nel with qualm and suspicion about the socially imposed codes she has believed in. Gradually, Nel comes to realize that has been the victim of social conventions and that she missed Sula and herself but never Jude. But it was late, sometime later Sula dies leaving Nel alone again.

In spite of Nel's attachment to her virtue and uprightness, this time she feels the urge of viewing things differently. She decides to visit Sula's grave. Once there and for the first time, the "soft ball of fur broke and scattered"(Morrison 174). This moment of epiphany enables Nel to discard the illusion of social morals and perceive the essence of life. Finally, she realizes that she lost the very valuable relationship of her life; her friendship with Sula. According to Maureen Reddy, "Nel finally does reach self-understanding, and it is Sula who leads her to it; her recognition of her true feelings provides her with that speck around which to grow" (10). She realizes that severing her relationship with Sula is the biggest blunder she has ever committed: "'All that time, all that time, i thought i was missing Jude.' ...'We was girls together,' she said as though explaining something. 'O Lord, Sula,' She cried... It was a fine cry-loud and long but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow"(Morrison 174). Recognizing that

losing her connection with Sula means losing herself, Nel laments the years she spends away from her friend. She also comprehends that they have been the victims of their mothers' defective raising and social regulations in general.

While Sula dies satisfied with her achievement, she prods her friend to go after her own pursuit for selfhood. By depicting Sula and Nel after their separation as desperate women without any sense of self-affirmation or joie de vivre, Morrison depicts the might of women's bonding vis-à-vis self-fulfilment.

Besides denouncing the limited constructions about black womanhood and black motherhood, Walker and Morrison revere female bonding as they help black women to counteract the intersectional forces that oppress them by providing a secure, healing and nurturing environment. Believing that black women's "bonding renders one sure way of bringing about ultimate success", Walker and Morrison give the example of Shug and Celie and Sula and Nel whose "coming together of body, mind, and spirit" brings determination and self-fulfilment (Hudson-Weems 67). Knowing that "fictions can be beneficial, imaginative, even transforming," Barbara Christian explains, Walker and Morrison, among many other black women writers, devote their works to sensitize black women about the necessity to fight for self-fulfilment in a racist and

patriarchal world that distance them from their mothers and imperils their existence (72). In sum, these works are a manifestation of Black women's ability to redress their position as being "passive objects of knowledge manipulated within prevailing knowledge validation processes", and a confirmation of their ability to transcend their maternal loss and assert their own individuality (Collins 266).

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