

## Love as morbidity in Morrison's love

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Deepti Dharmani, <sup>2</sup>Payal Malik

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Deptt. of English, CDLU, Sirsa.

<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Deptt. of English, CDLU, Sirsa

### Abstract

Love, which is very important for everybody to live fully, has almost lost its existence in the life of black people. Smitten with longtime struggle for emancipation from slavery and oppression, the context is hardly available in their lives. Moreover, popular culture has also been depicting blacks and their instincts in distorted ways using stereotypical terms. According to these, for blacks, love, passions and emotions are wholly subject to sexual propensities. Toni Morrison's eighth novel's title, however, seems to suggest an overt discussion of the word love as the novel is also named so but there is complete absence of this very emotion and whatever it portrays, it reflects only morbidity and treachery on love. Chiefly this novel presents the entangled feelings of love and betrayal between two African-American female friends related to a powerful patriarch Bill Cosey. This paper aims to explore the problematics of man-woman relationship that can even supersede staunch female friendship. In doing so it also focuses upon the negative impact of loveless relationship between children and parents. Despite living a large part of their life in the realm of revenge and hatred, the act of love at last enables Heed and Christine to realize their mutual bonding and retrieve their strong love.

**Keywords:** Love, morbidity, patriarchy and female-friendship.

### 1. Introduction

Love is divine only and difficult always. If you think it is easy you are a fool. If you think it is natural you are blind. It is a learned application without reason or motive except that it is God. Toni Morrison, (*Paradise* 141)

Love is an unfathomable and mysterious emotion. It is too difficult to understand it within the limited framework since its complexity keeps increasing with its intensity and gravity. Certainly, Morrison too supports it as she has presented her novel, *Love*, in an equally complicated way. The most complex element of the story is its central character, the powerful patriarch, Bill Cosey and his obsessively lovable position among the women of his surroundings. He is a self-lover; for him love does not mean nurturing self with others. Rather he uses others to satisfy himself or to remove his nastiness.

Though the title, *Love* implicates the novel to be the overt expression of the emotion, after reading the story, one would find that it is the portrayal of a loveless world vibrating with the sensations of betrayals and manipulative actions. Morrison herself points out in the forward added to the novel in year 2005: "People tell me that I am always writing about love. Always, always love. I nod, yes, but it isn't true – not exactly. In fact, I am always writing about betrayal. Love is the weather. Betrayal is the lightening that cleaves and reveals it" (Tsai 219). *Love* is such a saga where betrayal functions to cleave and illuminate the different contours of love.

The story completely revolves around the family saga of Cosey and his women lovers. However, at present Bill Cosey is not alive, his is an omnipresent and magnificent image, shaping and conditioning the responses of women, even after his death. As the titles of the chapter delineate, Bill Cosey assumes miscellaneous roles of father, husband, benefactor, lover and at times friend in his women company including Christine his granddaughter, May, his daughter-in-law, Julia, his first wife, Heed, his second child bride etc. The main focus of the

narrative is upon the troubled relationship between Heed and Christine. They were best friends until Bill married Heed at the age of eleven. But the unusual wedding turns them into mortal enemies by killing the innocent love of their childhood friendship. Thus here, too, like *Sula*, Morrison explores the problematics of man woman relationship that can even supersede staunch female friendship.

As Masi says "Now as a wise man moved by charitable feelings, now as a fool dominated by baser instincts", Cosey depicts numerous shades of his character in a number of alliances of his life (157). Cosey's weird viewpoint toward ties is shaped by his father's relationship with him. He is the son of a money-lover black snitch, popularly known in the community by the name, Dark, whose main occupation is to earn money and cheat people including blacks. Though, he accumulates a lot of wealth, he snubs attending his family's needs and desires. His meanness not only makes his family bereft of basic requirements such as food and clothes but also the most essential human drive, familial and parental love. Cosey hates his father's callousness but he fails to disunite himself from the latter's passion for wealth, inheriting the mean-spirit of his progenitor. Nevertheless, he lacks emotional tie with poor blacks, he does not relish exploiting them like his father. In fact, the guilt and remorse affixed in his heart by his father's evil actions keeps him in close affinity with poor. Probably the major cause that propels him to love an insignificant girl, Heed, the friend of his granddaughter, Christine.

The seed of childhood friendship between Heed and Christine blooms irrespective of their class discrimination. They meet on the private beach of Cosey. Instead of Christine's mother, May's attempt to chase away the unwanted girl, Christine defying socio-economic hurdles and the boundaries of class enthusiastically encourages Heed to share the splendor of her home, toys and clothes. And thus likewise *Sula*'s virtuous girlhood friendship that overwhelms Helen's resistance to their

intimacy, the joy, which Christine and Heed experience in their closeness, overtakes May's disagreement to their virtuous bonding.

In their extraordinary intimacy, together they invent their secret codes of love. Recollecting their friendship, Christine says, "She would never forget how she had fought for her, defied her mother to protect her, to picnic alone on the beach. They shared stomachache laughter, a secret language, and knew as they slept together that one's dreaming was the same as the other one's" (133). Their involvement in one another's dreams and imaginations, expressing blurring of boundaries between the self and the other implies a presumable prospect of their being involved in lesbian relationship also.

However, it seems that like *Sula*, it is their estranged mother-daughter relationship and the aspiration to compensate that emotional emptiness, which motivates them to foster a stronger relationship. To become an actual helpmate to her rich father-in-law, Cosey, after her husband's death, May preoccupies herself so much with hotel duties that it splits apart Christine from her when the former is only seven months old. On the other hand, Heed's mother too snaps ties of love with Heed to merely provide for their physical requirements of her family. The betrayal dominates the psyche of both. As at the end of the novel the reconciliatory talk of Christine's: "You know May wasn't much of a mother to me" is answered by Heed: "At least she didn't sell you" (184).

But despite their devotion and love the perils of patriarchy and non-supporting families soon decrepit the bonding between the girls. Primarily, it is Cosey who is guilty of ruining their virtuous bonding; he understands the girls' deep affinity despite this he ruins it selfishly illustrating his participation in the violation of human laws. Actually, Cosey marries Heed for having children who can fill the hollowness of his life. Moreover, he has a typical patriarchal imposition toward female virginity, by marrying a vulnerable girl like Heed he attempts to win full advantage of her sexuality and fertility. Masi too favors the logic: "52-year-old Bill Cosey married heed a pre-pubescent girl of 11 – a guarantee of her virginity and fertility" (155). Though this uneven marriage disharmonizes Cosey's entire family, the girls are especially affected as Cosey's interception turning the girls into rival with consequent animosity subsequently spoils their entire lives. As soon as Heed becomes Cosey's wife, Christine stops seeing her as her friend. Christine remarks, "To have your best and only friend leave the squealing splash in your bathtub, trade the stories made up . . . for a dark room . . . and an old man's business, doing things no one would describe but were so terrible no one could ignore them. She would not forget that. Why should she? It changed her life" (133). Exploiting a mean role of Heed's husband Cosey not only abuses Heed but also abuses his relationship with his granddaughter, Christine.

However, the identification of the husband of a child bride imparts Cosey nothing but the image of a pedophile and hateful dictator. Besides Cosey's family, the community also bears witness to Cosey's child-abuse without any protest. Cosey's fishing friend, Sandler well knows his abnormal sexual inclinations. It is Cosey himself who gives him the vivid description about the prepubescent body of Heed; "hips narrow, chest smooth as a plank, skin soft and damp, like a lip. Invisible navel above scant, newborn hair" (148). But Morrison holds Heed's family as more responsible for her abuse and misuse. Being agents of the most lovesome ties, the well-being

of Heed should have been their first priority, but playing with their daughter's future for their own comfort they reduce the worth of love ties to their base affairs: "That trash gave her up like they would a puppy" (105). Furthermore, Heed too having unhealthy kinship ties fails to recognize the damaging effects of her unusual marriage.

Though, after marriage Cosey keeps her isolated from her family, friend and community, she soon begins to cherish the beneficial opportunities earned by the prosperous shift as she says "Marriage was a chance for me to get out, to learn how to sleep in a real bed, to have somebody ask you what you wanted to eat, then labor over the dish" (127). She is not upset for his disturbing age, though to address him she always uses "Papa". Heed's response manifests her lack of maturity and capability to comprehend the things. Perhaps, it is this improper marriage that stunts her ability to grow and develop the identity of her own. And instead of trying to reconcile her intimate friendship with Christine she ends up pursuing the marks of her family, selling friendship for money.

Distressed by the feelings of jealousy and betrayal Christine also avoids to acknowledge the fact behind the loathsome marriage and prefers to see her once closest friend as her strongest enemy. The narrator states, "Like friendship, hatred needed more than physical intimacy; it wanted creativity and hard work to sustain itself" (74). The thing that erodes Christine's psyche most is her rejection by her manipulated and lovelorn mother. Unable to rival the powerful patriarch, May exploits the girl by misguiding and damaging their friendship. Consequently, suffering to be a replaced and displaced woman when four years later Christine returns home, she is radically changed. She is not that previous sinless and wet-eyed Christine who had set off rubbing tears from her fragile hands. The gulf between the girls grows wider: "They did not pretend to like each other and . . . hid curiosity like pros" (125). Like her mother, Christine too begins to seek chances to relegate Heed and once during a casual conversation she truly tries to counterattack Heed by showing off her school elegance. It greatly delights her to see that instead of supporting his wife, her grandfather is on her side but she is unfamiliar of Heed's current repulsion. Unwillingly, once again she has to suffer the re-agon of leaving her home when furious Heed sets her room on fire. When she is re-alienated from her family, feeling deprivation of familial love she undergoes several illicit or licit love affairs but can never experience healthy and fulfilling relationship.

Their fractured friendship seems irremediable when their battle to win the love of father figure transforms into a battle for inheriting his money and his last love-token "sweet Cosey child" (200). They do not embrace each other even after his death. Their life-long stifle over being the only recipient of Cosey's will shows how wealth and class corrupt the depth of their love and friendship which nobody except L ever endeavors to recognize and describe. L says,

If such children find each other before they know their own sex, or which one of them is starving, which well fed; before they know color from no color, kin from stranger, then they have found a mix of surrender and mutiny they can never live without. Heed and Christine found such a one. (199)

Afterward, having endured several years of severance when on the account of serving her sick mother Christine returns to Cosey's mansion they choose remarkably distant suites: "each woman lived in a spotlight separated – or connected – by the

darkness between them” (25). The darkness that keeps them joined even after the imperishable isolation is a metaphor for enigmatic identity of Bill Cosey – an axis of love and hate. Their love for Cosey’s belongings in juxtaposition to their extreme hatred and mutual disloyalty leads them to hire assistants for themselves. Christine consults a lawyer and Heed employs a girl secretary named Junior, who ultimately but accidentally becomes the agent of rebirthing love between them. The futile contest between the two reaches its decisive moments when they finally see each other in the hotel on a death point: “The eyes of each are enslaved by the others. Opening pangs of guilt, rage, fatigue, despair are replaced by a hatred so pure, so solemn, it feels beautiful, almost holy” (177). Instead of accusing each other, their eventual bonding realizes them of their loveless macrocosms. Christine reveals that May only loved Big Man’s desires and greater than anybody else it was she who acted as “Daddy’s girl” (184). Heed too divulges her unloving parents’ business deal with Cosey. Their revived understanding terminates their prolonged wars and motivates them to comprehend their love for each other. They admit: “We could have been living our lives hand in hand instead of looking for Big Daddy everywhere” and thus in the end their purest love overcomes the besotted attraction set out by Cosey (189).

Though, this realization makes them to reconcile their virtuous ties, like *Sula* it comes too late to make up for the loss. But it seems that through dramatizing the possibilities of healing, perhaps, like hooks, Morrison too wishes to call for a sisterhood, crucial to outdo differences. In her book *Communion*, hooks explains, “Sisterhood wasn’t just about what we shared in common—things like periods, obsessive concern with our looks, or bitching about men—it was about women learning how to care for one another and be in solidarity, not just when we have complaints or when we feel victimized” (qtd. in Sy 69-70).

So conclusively, it can be said, although, Morrison has presented mainly the negative sides of characters and their wrong doings for winning possessions, ultimately it is love and its mysterious power that triumphs. The girls, whom conflicting faces of life had made morbid and deviant, eventually, realize their worthwhile friendship and this rebirthing of love between them is the evidence of Morrison’s everlasting faith in loving and adoring humanity.

## References

1. Morrison Toni. *Paradise*. London: Vintage Books, 1999.
2. Morrison Toni. *Love*. London: Vintage Books, 2004.
3. Masi Jacqueline Berben. Justice in Toni Morrison’s *Love*. *GRAAT*, 2010; 152-167. Web.6 Oct. 2014.
4. Tsai, Chia-chin. But the Gretest of These Is Love: Desire for the Father and Agape in Toni Morrison’s *Love*. *Literary and Cultural Studies* 2010; 36(1):217-241. Web. 6 Oct. 2014.
5. Sy Kadidia. *Women's Relationships: Female Friendship in Toni Morrison's Sula and Love, Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter and Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come*. Diss. Georgia State University, 2008. Web. 18 Aug. 2015.