



FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND BUSINESS STUDIES
Department of Humanities

Representations of motherhood in Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and Morisson's *Beloved*

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HT – 2017

Student thesis, Level: 15 Credits
English
Teacher Education Programme
ENG512 English for Teachers 61-90cr

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Examiner: Marko Modiano

Abstract

This thesis is a comparative analysis of the African American author Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* and the Native American writer Louise Erdrich's novel *Love Medicine*. The focus of this essay will be the theme motherhood. A feminist theoretical and critical approach are used throughout the thesis and focus is laid upon the third wave of feminism which: "borrows from post-structural and contemporary gender and race theories (...) to expand on marginalized populations' experiences." (Purdue OWL). In the novel *Love Medicine* the characters Marie and Lulu are examined. Both characters are strong independent women and through them the author challenges the Western-European image of motherhood, family and female characteristics. In the novel *Beloved*, the characters Sethe and Baby Suggs are studied with two focus points. The first is the impact that motherhood can have on the development of the self and how Morrison shows this through the character Sethe. The second focus point is the effects that come from slavery and mainly the effects that can come from the denial of motherhood. These novels manage to challenge the western norm of motherhood through different aspects and in different ways.

Keywords: Motherhood, Erdrich, Morrison, feminist theory

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Introduction

Even though history has provided the world with extraordinary female writers such as Jane Austen or Emily Brontë, it can still be argued that the vocation for many decades has been male dominated. Furthermore, the way that women have been portrayed in literature can in many cases be found to enforce the unequal power relationship between men and women. Because of this, one can claim that literature has been influenced by a patriarchal mindset. The Western nuclear family and the female trait of motherhood have also long been stereotyped within society as well as literature. According to Stephanie Demetrakopoulos (51) motherhood can also be said to have been glorified in literature, for example through the conception that every woman will enjoy being a mother, while darker sides of mothering, such as loss of self or depression, have instead rarely been explored. That motherhood in-itself is something biological cannot be refuted, but that it therefore in no way can be harmful to the person mothering might not always be the case. This essay will focus on the literary use and manifestation of motherhood within two novels, *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. These two novels are examples of literature that has been written by women and that has challenged the stereotypical view of motherhood. The examination will be narrowed down to two main characters from each novel to create a more focused analysis. The characters Lulu and Marie will be chosen from *Love Medicine* and Sethe and Baby Suggs from *Beloved*. The view of mothers and motherhood in accordance to the different cultures within the novels will be analysed and considered in an attempt to reveal reasons why the kind of representation used in the two novels might be powerful and significant in the context of a feminist critical approach. This essay will also aim to explore the differences in motherhood that the two novels present, and these differences will then be surveyed in correlation to the different

cultures represented. This relationship can then be used as an indicator toward the author's reasons for this presentation as well as the effects that it might produce in general. Therefore, the research questions for this essay are: "How is motherhood presented in the two novels?" and "What reason can the author have to use it in the way that she does?"

Theoretical and critical approach

The novels create an insight into two different non-Western cultures. Erdrich's work, *Love Medicine*, depicts the lives of two Native American families while Morrison's *Beloved* presents the reader with the lives of African American slaves who in one way or another manage to escape their owner. Further on, in both of these novels the presence of mothers and motherhood is palpable. Since motherhood within these novels will be the central focus of this thesis the main theoretical approach taken will be a feminist one. The fact that the two novels are both written by female authors will provide extra support for the choice of a feminist approach. Michael Ryan writes that the initial idea of feminism was an attempt to find out 'why women have had a subordinate role to men'. Two conflicting ways of answering this question emerged; one was that there is a biological difference between men and women and the way that they think and act, while the other believed it to be the result of social construction (Ryan 131). This essay will take the latter into consideration when analysing the material. Peter Barry writes the following:

The representation of women in literature, then, was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialisation', since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. (117)

An infinite number of other aspects besides literature that contribute to social construction exist in today's society. For example; "Even modern cultural forms such as film, because the industry is largely owned and controlled by men, foster assumptions that further the subordination of women. Images of strong publicly competent women are hard to come by (...)" (Ryan 132). Even though other influential areas exist when considering social construction, literature is one of these and is therefore still a vital area to consider.

Within feminism there is said to be "three waves" which feminist literary theory in many ways has followed (Purdue OWL). The last of which is said to be from early 1990 to present day,

resisting the perceived essentialist (over generalized, over simplified) ideologies and a white, heterosexual, middle class focus of second wave feminism, third wave feminism borrows from post-structural and contemporary gender and race theories (...) to expand on marginalized populations' experiences. (Purdue OWL).

Both African American women and Native American women have faced difficulties not only from a feminist standpoint but from an ethnic one as well (Chornokur 10,14).

Neither African or Native American women gained a place within the feminist movement during the first two waves of feminism. According to black feminist critic bell hooks, one reason can be that "throughout American history white men have deliberately promoted hostility and divisiveness between white and black women. (...) preventing the growth of solidarity between women ensuring woman's status as a subordinate group under patriarchy remains intact" (hooks 155). Furthermore, African American women faced not only the patriarchal oppression towards women, but also the

racial fight in general. Bell hooks also points to another big problem that African American women have faced:

Just as 19th century black male leaders felt that it was important that all black men show themselves willing to be protectors and providers of their women as a sign to the white race that they would tolerate no more denial of their masculine privilege (...). They all argued that it is absolutely necessary for black men to relegate black women to a subordinate position both in the political sphere and in home life. (94)

The same problem presented itself to Native American women who found themselves in between both the gender oppression as well as the racial one. Chornokur states that “Native women found it more difficult to reject the patriarchal aspects of the Native American movement in the name of self-empowerment” (13). Many Native American women believed that it was because of the negative influence of the Western culture that created the detrimental changes in gender roles within tribal life, and therefore many fought for racial liberation instead (Chornokur 14,15). Because of these difficulties faced by African and Native American women within their respective ethnic communities, the feminist theoretical approach can be considered to be very relevant for both these two novels. They present the reader with both an insight into another view of motherhood in contrast to a Western one, as well as novels where ‘the hero’ is both strong, female and non-white.

Analysis

Love Medicine

Love Medicine is set in North Dakota on a Chippewa reservation. Being a woman and a mother within the Chippewa tradition is a very important role according to Meldan Tanrisal: “women make up the backbone of the family which is of outmost importance to the Native American” (4). This view of women contradicts the stereotypical western view where often the man who supports the family financially is more likely to be considered the ‘backbone’ of the family. Support for the idea that the man is the ‘backbone’ can also be found through the fact that western culture is patrilineal in contrast to the Native American society which often is matrilineal. Tanrisal continues to state that the mothers are not only important for the relationships within the Native American family but within the community as well. Further support for this is presented by Priscilla K. Buffalohead in her article “Farmers Warriors Traders: A Fresh Look at Ojibway Women” where she discusses women’s role in Native American culture. In her article, she describes the relationship between men and women in Ojibway history and culture as one based on a mutual respect rather than subordination (Buffalohead 244). The importance of mothers within Native American tradition is also highlighted by Paula Gunn Allen who writes that “your mother’s identity is the key to your own identity” (209).

Louise Erdrich incorporates nature all through her novel. She uses vivid descriptions of the surrounding landscape and she also uses nature descriptions as symbols to emphasise characters’ feelings as well as their state of mind or accounts of their actions: “I never grew from the curve of my mother’s arms. I still wanted to anchor myself against her. But she had tore herself away from the run of my life like a

riverbank. She had vanished, a great surrounding shore, leaving me to spill out alone” (Erdrich 68). In this quote Lulu Nanapush is talking about her mother who left her when she was young. Erdrich uses nature to create a picture of a little girl wanting to hold on to her mother, to “anchor” herself. The author’s description of the riverbank that disappears, a riverbank that had once been a surrounding shore, can be seen first as a symbol of a mother’s loving and protecting arms no longer keeping the child safe, i.e. [.] she is “spilling out alone” as there is nothing to keep her in place. Secondly, it can be seen as the author emphasising the ‘unnatural’ element of a mother leaving her child since even if a riverbank were to collapse and disappear the remaining earth would then be the “new” riverbank and by that logic a riverbank would never vanish. Kateryna Chornokur states that “The Native American worldview includes nature as an indispensable and inseparable part of human society” (25) and so this nature connection throughout the novel can also be interpreted as the author implicitly highlighting the importance of nature within the Native American culture. Since images of nature are consistently used by the author, one can also consider the phrase ‘mother nature’. If Erdrich’s treatment of nature is conjoined with that turn of phrase, the concept of motherhood can be said to be constantly present all through the novel.

Stephanie Demetrakopoulos brings up the issue of motherhood deteriorating or diminishing a person’s development of their own self. She pursues this thesis in her analysis of the novel *Beloved* (which will be addressed later on in the analysis).

However, Elaine Tuttle Hansen states that:

We will want to be cautious about assuming that Native American mothers feel the need to be relieved of either the burdens of child care or the dominant myths of motherhood in order to develop the kind of autonomous selfhood or freedom

from the oppressions of femininity that mainstream Euroamerican culture – along with many of its feminist critics – valorizes. (117)

Support for the view of Native American mothers as not necessarily detrimentally affected by motherhood can be found in Louise Erdrich's novel *Love Medicine*. She presents the reader with two fierce characters, Marie and Lulu, two women who do not lose themselves in being mothers. The character Marie does not despair when her husband leaves her for Lulu. That is because she has a well-defined image of who she is: "I would not care if Lulu Lamartine ended up the wife of the chairman of the Chippewa Tribe. I'd still be Marie. Marie. Star of the Sea! I'd shine when they stripped off the wax!" (Erdrich 165). Even though the quote is specific towards the idea of her husband leaving her it still manages to make it clear to the reader that Marie has not lost her own self up to this point in her life. Since she has not lost herself one can assume that motherhood has not crippled her ability to "still be Marie".

The character Lulu also shows that motherhood has not diminished her own self or her ability to develop it. She has a clear image of who she is as well as of others' view of her: "No one ever understood my wild and secret ways. They used to say that Lulu Lamartine was like a cat, loving no one, only purring to get what she wanted. But that's not true. I was in love with the whole world and all that lived in its rainy arms" (Erdrich 276). Yet, even though the two characters do not show any clear signs of losing themselves in motherhood, the reader is presented with the statement that "In youth, Marie and Lulu were both terrors, cutting a wide unholy swath. In marriage they fiercely raised their children. It was in age that they came into their own" (Erdrich 303). This passage can be used as support for the view of the self being put on hold while raising one's children. However, it can also be interpreted and used as support for an

entirely different standpoint. This view of the quote is instead that motherhood has not made them put themselves on hold, rather it has become a part of them. The two mothers in question go on to gather people from the tribe that, as they do, want to fight to keep their heritage and culture intact.

With Nector Kashpaw gone, the two were now free to concentrate their powers, and once they got together they developed strong and hotheaded followings among our local agitating group of hard-eyes, a determined bunch who grew out their hair in braids or ponytails and dressed in ribbon shirts and calico to make their point. Traditionals. Back-to-the-buffalo types. (Erdrich 303)

This can be seen as them mothering their community, focusing on keeping their heritage intact, instead of dedicating themselves exclusively to their children and grandchildren. This could then indicate that them being mothers have not ended, as it is only their focus that has shifted. In other words, motherhood is not something that has diminished their own self, but it is part of who they are. Lulu is even trying to convince her son, who has been chosen to run the new factory on the reservation, who to hire to keep the peace within the tribe (Erdrich 308). The fact that mothers play such an important role in the Native American culture, not only for the family but also for the community, as Tanrisal and Allen maintain, further corroborates this interpretation of the two female protagonists and the events of the narrative.

The character of Marie Kashpaw can be seen as a representation of the ideal mother, or as Meldan Tanrisal calls her; “the super mother” (4). She is married to Nector Kashpaw and not only do they conceive children of their own, but Marie also adopts other children who are in need of a family; “Oh yes, Marie kept taking in babies right along. Like the butter, there was a surplus of babies on the reservation, and we

seemed to get unexpected shipments from time to time” (Erdrich 134-135). Through the character of Marie, Erdrich presents an image of a family that might not coincide with the Western view of a nuclear family but one that is more true to a Native American way of looking upon family and kinship which is more spiritual than biological.

Catherine Rainwater states that

The idea that biological children are somehow superior or preferred over other children who belong in a nuclear family is a Western-European, not a Native American, concept. On the contrary, the Native American “family” allows for various ties of kinship – including spiritual kinship and clan membership – joining the individuals living together in the house. (418)

It can be argued that Erdrich shows this family view through Marie’s relationship and feelings towards June, who is not her biological child, “So I took the girl. I kept her. It wasn’t long before I would want to hold her against me tighter than any of the others.” (Erdrich 87). Through the character of Marie, the author depicts a resilient woman who defies the western idea of a mother that only takes care of their biological children and the household. Marie cares for all her children as well as her mother-in-law, Rushes Bear, *and* her husband. Towards the end of the novel she even takes care of Lulu when she goes almost blind even though a rivalry between the two women has existed ever since Nector chose Lulu over Marie. Since her husband Nector has a tendency to spend all the money he earns on alcohol Marie has to make sure that the family survives with other means than the money she would otherwise get from her husband. Besides taking care of the family as well as providing both money and food, she also cleans her husband up, gets him sober and eventually manages to get him to become the chairman of the tribe. This image stands widely apart from the more patriarchal view of the wife

and mother where the mother is only expected to take care of the children while the father is the provider of the household.

The other character that will be examined in Erdrich's literary work is Lulu Lamartine. In contrast to the previously mentioned character, Marie Kashpaw, Lulu is promiscuous and keeps the company of several men besides her husband throughout her years. Tanrisal names her the "seductive mother" and describes how she is rejected by the community for her unconventional ways (4). Through Lulu, Erdrich presents a subversion of the Western nuclear family, all her children being illegitimate, and confirms the matrilineal structure within Native American society. Paula Gunn Allen emphasises the importance of the mother in the Native American culture. Among other things she states that

Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same as being lost – isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life. (Allen 209).

Throughout Erdrich's novel this is highlighted through the lack of impact from paternal roles. It can also be argued that this is shown through the character Lipsha Morrissey who in the end of the novel is told that his mother is June Kashpaw. After this revelation Erdrich continues with the phrase "Lipsha Morrissey who was now on the verge of knowing who he was" (337) and further down on the same page Lulu explains "You never knew who you were. That's one reason why I told you" (ibid).

However, there is one thing that is interesting about the character of Lulu Lamartine, especially when viewed through feminist criticism. Even though it is mentioned throughout the novel that people believe Lulu to be manipulative and heartless, “like a cat, loving no one, only purring to get what she wanted” (Erdrich 276), the reader can still see Lulu for what she is, a strong and independent woman. She is adored by her children and even though they all have different fathers her being their mother is enough for them. She does not let anyone push her or her family around. When it is decided that she has to leave her house and move elsewhere, she stands her ground and refuses to move until she is offered a house that she deems worthy. As she grows old and her children move out, her strength and leadership are shown through her and Marie’s involvement in the preservation of their culture and traditions. In Western culture and in a more patriarchal view of the character, Lulu would more likely be condemned and shamed. In many ways Lulu has all the characteristics that when presented in a male character would be cause for respect and admiration. However, when presented as characteristics of a woman, the woman would more likely be chastised for them, both within literature and in real life. Instead of a woman and a mother that is condemned for such traits, Erdrich presents the reader with a strong female character who is loved, feared and eventually also respected within her tribe. A passage within the novel states that Lulu despite having eight boys to care for still manages to keep her house clean and organised (Erdrich 114). Another passage from the same chapter also reveals some similar capabilities that Lulu possesses: “Lulu was bustling about the kitchen in a calm, automatic frenzy. She seemed to fill pots with food by pointing at them and take things from the oven that she’d never put in. The table jumped to set itself” (Erdrich 119). The choice of opposing words made by the author, calm and frenzy, creates an image of Lulu being methodological as well as swift in her endeavours. Through the

characterisation of Lulu Lamartine, Erdrich defies the concept of 'how a woman should be' and instead gives the reader a character that is as independent as she is capable.

Beloved

Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, also presents a strong female character who is driven by her need to be a good mother. This character is named Sethe, and the reader is presented with a growing image of a fierce mother who almost literally goes through hell to be with her children. This extreme maternal drive can be seen in many instances, as, for example, when she tells the story of the time that one of the nephews of the schoolteacher beat her bloody with a whip for telling Ms Garner that he and his brother had raped her; "'They used cowhide on you?' 'And they took my milk.' 'They beat you and you was pregnant?' 'And they took my milk!'" (Morrison 25). With this passage Morrison shows how strongly Sethe identifies herself as a mother. The fact that Sethe is most upset over the theft of her milk, i.e. her physical means to nurture her child, instead of both the rape and the beating, gives the reader a clear view of her priorities. Throughout the novel, Morrison uses a very literal and direct language in connection to Sethe's motherhood. Several times in the novel, Sethe's breasts are mentioned in connection to her being a mother. The breasts become a very literal symbol of her ability to feed her children as well as her ability to be a mother. Through this symbol the author ties these two images together and motherhood becomes intertwined and directly connected to the ability to feed one's children. The author also makes this correlation between motherhood and the ability to shield one's children. When Sethe is fleeing from Sweet Home she manages to stay alive not for herself but for her unborn child. There is even mentioning in the novel of her longing for death, but if she dies, so will eventually also her baby.

“I believe this baby’s ma’am is gonna die in wild onions on the bloody side of the Ohio River.” (...) And it didn’t seem such a bad idea, all in all, in view of the step she would not have to take, but the thought of herself stretched out dead while the little antelope lived on – an hour? a day? a day and a night? – in her lifeless body grieved her so she made the groan that made the person walking on a path not ten yards away halt and stand right still. (Morrison 41)

This creates an image of mothering at its most basic level, protection and food, and together they form one simple image: survival. Yet there is more to mothering than just survival. The emotions present are complex and cannot be described in one simple way. One opinion as to the author’s choice of words and events within the novel can be to show this complexity. Basic motherly instincts are not the only emotion that is shown by Morrison through the character of Sethe, instead the fact that she tries to kill all her children to save them from a fate, according to her, worse than death shows a whole array of conflicting emotions at play. Even though she previously has shown an incredible resolve when it comes to keeping her children alive, she is now determined that the only way that she can protect them is to kill them.

Within Morrison’s narrative there is also the character Baby Suggs who is Sethe’s mother in law. This character also portrays a mother but not in the same way as Sethe. In contrast to Sethe Baby Suggs has lost all of her children. She stood by when they were being sold to other slave owners, all but her youngest.

And no matter, for the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home. Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew

more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like. (Morrison 163)

In this passage, Morrison rewords the commonplace saying that losing your children means losing a part of yourself. Being a mother was something denied to slaves, since they were not supposed to have children, but only supposed to breed them. This quote presents a very powerful image of the damage that the denial of such primal human rights can do to someone. Further on this quote also indicates the impossibility of discovering one's own self as part of the slave population. Since Baby Suggs was never allowed to keep her children for any longer period of time the fact she does not know them is therefore understandable. However, through the claim that she knows more about her children than herself the author creates a clear image of the restrictions and powerlessness over one's self that existed among slaves.

There are many parts of the novel that develop an image of the powerlessness among the slaves. They did not own their own bodies or lives, something that is clearly shown when Baby Suggs body 'comes to life' as soon as she is free and leaves Sweet Home; "'These hands belong to me. These *my* hands.'" Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat. Had it been there all along?" (Morrison 164). Baby Suggs can also be seen in the novel as a mother to the community in which she lives after being bought free by her youngest son. When she arrives at her new home everything but Baby Suggs' heart is broken. All through her life she has protected it by not looking too closely at her children since she would never see them change into adults (Morrison 161). Upon her arrival at 124 she decides to put her heart to work and becomes an unchurched preacher, helping people within her

community to find strength and help them love themselves (104). Here Morrison gives Baby Suggs a mother role to her community, and since preachers often are connected to a parental figure the connection to motherhood is emphasised with Baby Suggs taking on such a role within her community.

An interesting interpretation of motherhood and maternal bonds in a feminist approach that can be made from reading Morrison's novel is presented by Stephanie Demetrakopoulos. Her analysis states that Morrison is showing the detrimental effects of the self that can come from being absorbed by motherhood. The interpretation is that Sethe might not be able to find or develop another part of herself other than the maternal one while the mother within her is still strong. This, Demetrakopoulos states, is because "mothering can extinguish the developing self of the mother" (51). One could however argue that it is not the maternal part extinguishing the other possible selves that Morrison is trying to show through her novel but instead what things people can be driven to when denied the opportunity to develop a self at all and instead are being treated like breeding animals. It can be that both interpretations of the novel are correct. However, there are several indicators that can be found within the novel which support the conclusion that is drawn by Demetrakopoulos: "she was frightened by the thought of having a baby once more. Needing to be good enough, strong enough, *that* caring – again. Having to stay alive just that much longer. O Lord, she thought, deliver me. Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (Morrison 154). Here Sethe states out right to the reader what being a mother has meant and will mean for her: to give her all in an attempt to protect her children, not being able to care for anyone else including herself. Strong indicators toward Sethe's longing for help and support can also be found within the novel. When Paul D first shows up she reveals the thought of not having to be strong all the time; "What she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in

somebody else's hands. (...) Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was here to catch her if she sank" (Morrison 26). Sethe's breasts and their milk are throughout the novel a symbol of her ability to take care of her children, to feed them. When stating that the responsibility for the breast *at last* no longer was hers alone the reader is told that the fear and responsibility that she has felt for her children all this time has been tiring. Until the end of the novel Sethe's only purpose in life is to be a mother to her children. There is a separation, made by the author, between the mother and Sethe herself, as she is never concerned about her own survival but the survival of her children's mother (Morrison 40). This distinction between the mother and Sethe also supports the idea that Morrison wishes to show how motherhood can subdue the creation of a self separate from the woman's maternal role.

Another thing that can be interpreted as a symbol within the novel, and can be seen to support Demetrakopoulos' conclusion, is the house they live in. It is called 124 and can be seen as a representation of Sethe's mind. When she arrives at 124 it is a happy place full of life. At this point in her life Sethe is physically broken, but mentally she is proud and happy to have made it to freedom as well as managed to save her children from the slave life. Twenty-eight days after Sethe's arrival at 124 she is found by the new master of Sweet Home, schoolteacher. This causes her to start killing her children in an attempt to save them from the fate that she otherwise knows awaits. After this event the house stops being what it used to be: the house that was once full of life is instead abandoned by everyone except Baby Suggs, Sethe and the three remaining children. There are no more visitors, Baby Suggs' heart starts to collapse and the baby ghost takes hold of the house. The house, just like Sethe's mind, shuts down. She is haunted by her guilt and loss of her baby girl, just as the house itself is haunted by the same baby ghost. She alienates herself from the community, so the house that was once

a place which tied the community together is now empty and closed. When Paul D enters the house for the first time he manages to exorcise the ghost of Beloved. He has the same affect upon Sethe who for the first time in years starts to relax and let someone in. However, the ghost, Beloved, comes back in human form and manages to push Paul D out of the house. Sethe's guilt is renewed and with the realisation that Beloved is her dead daughter she, just like the house, closes up even more. No one except her daughters are let in which also physically can be seen through the failed attempts to enter the house made by Stamp Paid. Sethe becomes consumed with making amends with her first born daughter and just as the house she starts to slowly deteriorate. In the end when Beloved has once more been chased away with the help of other mothers within the community, Paul D once more enters the house.

Something is missing from 124. Something larger than the people who lived there. Something more than Beloved and the red light. He can't put his finger on it, but it seems, for a moment, that just beyond his knowing is the glare of an outside thing that embraces while it accuses (Morrison 312).

Continuing with the analytic idea above, this quote can then be interpreted as Sethe being tired and confused, not knowing who she is any more. Just as the house she is run down and dilapidated. She is no longer needed as a protective mother of Denver who now can stand on her own, nor is she driven by her guilt and need to please Beloved (even though one cannot assume that such a trauma as that of Beloved's death can ever truly disappear). That she describes her breasts as "exhausted" would also indicate that she is wearied of being the caregiving mother, she is ready for a new chapter of herself (313). The idea that Sethe is ready to move on in her life can also be

strengthened by the indications that the house will be sold. If the house is a representation of Sethe's mind, it being sold can be interpreted as Sethe moving on from that part of herself. Finally, with the words "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (314) Paul D seems to give Sethe the spark that will help her find a new future for herself outside the self that she has been for so many years.

Conclusion

Erdrich is through her novel managing to undermine the constructed notion of women and mothers being a homogenous group. She achieves this by emphasising the cultural differences that exist between the Native American culture and the Western culture, as well as providing the reader with two very different characters, Marie and Lulu, that share one important trait: being beloved and fierce mothers. The fact that the mothers are different in their personality as well as in their mothering, yet still have to be considered successful, endorses the idea of mothers *not* being a homogenous group. Through the different representations of motherhood within the novel Erdrich also brings the Native American culture into the spotlight. Since the idea of mothers and motherhood differs between the Native American and the Western culture in America, and the fact that the perception of mothers among the Native Americans often is more revered creates a positive image from a feminist perspective. Erdrich presents her mothers and gives them the role of the hero and saviour; saviours of Native American culture and heroes to both their children as well as to their society. In doing this the author raises both new and varying images of mothers, as well as bringing forward traits of the native culture.

In turn, Morrison also creates a novel that stands up and challenges the western norm of motherhood. Through her character Sethe, she shows that being a mother can be a very demanding job, and that motherhood might actually inhibit the development of the inner self. Further, she also achieves to accentuate the horrors that slaves went through as well as the detrimental effect that the denial of human traits have on a human being. This is managed through, among other things, the denial of motherhood. Since many can relate to the idea of family and being a mother and a parent, the repercussions that the inability to have and care for a family of your own is something that can be universally understood. This fact indicates that the message of the inhumane treatments towards slaves will easily be received by a reader.

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