

T. Komarovskaya,
BSPU, Minsk, Belarus

Maternal Love and Quest for Identity in Contemporary American Feminist Prose

Maternal love is one of the main concepts which feminist prose is analyzing. Investigation of maternal love and its role in the upbringing of daughters is at the base of T. Morrison's novel "Sula".

In 1974 Alice Walker spelled out the logical conclusions of the promoter stance, being less historical and more overtly mythologizing. Walker wrote that the mother, as a model of strength and creativity, and the mother-daughter relationship, as a symbol of the biological and spiritual bond between all women, represented a force of almost mythic power for black women. Through reverence for and identification with the mother, black women can gain insight into themselves, form alliances with each other, and place themselves in an uninterrupted historical continuum of womanly, maternal strength. In the essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" Walker writes that although black women have been called "Matriarchs", "Superwomen", and "Mean and Evil Bitches", "their true strength is not malignant, but rather lies in the simple ability to maintain an inner core of creativity in the face of unbelievable oppression" [1], Walker's main thought is that strong African American mothers pass an invaluable legacy to their daughters: "Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength - in search of my mother's garden, I found my own" [2].

Toni Morrison's book Sula, written at the time when these ideas were being formed in the black feminist movement, is basically their artistic representation, though the author's purpose is to investigate the opposite situation: what happens to young women in their quest for identity when their mothers are not up to this high moral task, do not show spiritual and moral strength that they could bequest to their daughters.

But maternal love plays no less role among white Americans, and its absence is as harmful for the upbringing of white girls. Mary Gordon's novel "Men and Angels" investigates the influence of maternal love (or its absence) on the formation of a woman's personality. Laura, the heroine of the novel, has always been neglected and despised by her mother. As a young girl, she finds consolation in the Bible. She assures herself she is the Chosen of the Lord, and her Mission on Earth is to teach people that all love and attachments are nothing, one should serve the Spirit and be Saved this way. Anne, another heroine of the novel, is looking for a nurse for her two children and hires Laura for that purpose. Being extremely kind-hearted by nature, she tries to suppress her dislike for

Laura. Laura is really very unlovable. She has never been loved by anybody and can't inspire this feeling. But Laura loves Anne with all her heart and, true to her concept of reality, sees her Mission in Saving Anne, and dreams Anne loves her as well. When Anne finds out Laura has endangered the lives of her children by neglect, she sacks Laura and the latter, in disappointment and despair, commits suicide in her house in the most dreadful way.

There are three mothers in the novel who serve the author's purpose to analyze the phenomenon of maternal love. Laura's mother is a mean nonentity who killed her own daughter by her hatred. For Anne who married because, first and foremost, she wanted "to reinvent family life", children are most important, her love for them knows no limits. With the personality of the third mother, Caroline, the second important theme is introduced in the novel, that is intellectual life of a woman and the possibility to realize herself within family life. Two plot lines develop this theme in the novel: Anne's story who had brilliantly graduated from Harvard but devoted herself since then to children and family life, and Caroline Watson's story, who left her four-year-old boy seeking realization as a painter. She succeeded in her work, she drew wonderful pictures, but her son whom she had never tried to understand became a drunkard and committed suicide at 28.

One of the main themes of the book is the theme of Art and its connection to life. Studying Caroline's life and work for the organization of exhibition, Anne is struck by the fact that all the pictures of Caroline who had never known family life and had never loved her son praised maternal love and family virtues. Anne is bewildered by this strange sublimation of maternal love exposing itself only in art.

The construction of the novel reminds of a triple mirror, which doesn't produce a direct reflection. Anne's and Laura's stories are basically alike (both of them suffered from the deficiency of maternal love as children), but get quite different development in the novel. Anne, this central part of this triple mirror system, is as eager to realize herself as Caroline, but would never do it at the cost of her children's happiness or comfort. At the end of the novel Anne having got over the dread of Laura's suicide in her house, suffering from the thought that this tragedy has deprived her children of childhood and she can't help them, comes to the conclusion which is Mary Gordon's conclusion as well. Yes, there can be various manifestations of maternal love, from complete indifference to the feeling, which killed children actually or spiritually. "And there was the other part of mother love: it was not all of life. ... and it was a tremendous mercy. For there was so little you could do for them, even if you spent every moment with them ... You gave them life, you loved them, then you opened them to the world. You could never protect them; so you left them to themselves. That was the mercy that

you could turn from them to something else, something ... they couldn't be a part of' [6]. And Anne decides to devote herself to studying Caroline Watson's work.

So Mary Gordon who belongs to the less radical trend in the U.S. feminist literature suggests this most balanced solution to the problem of female self-realization.

РЕПОЗИТОРИЙ БГПУ