

A Feeling or Something More: Love as a Liberating Force in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Sula* and *The Women of Brewster Place*

by

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Abstract

Love. The word itself has become a cliché and literary works dealing with it run the risk of being presumptively categorized as sentimental fiction. In academia there is an uneasiness surrounding the topic. However, in African American culture there is a different love: "Active love". This thesis explores the use of as active love as suggested by bell hooks and Martin Luther King, Jr. as a practice of freedom and as a force that empowers the individual and community. This study focuses on the following three novels: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Toni Morrison's *Sula*, and Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*. Each culminates in the empowerment of the individual character and their community through active love.

Resumen

Amor. La palabra misma se ha convertido en un cliché, por lo que los trabajos literarios corren el riesgo de ser categorizados como ficción sentimental. En el mundo académico hay ansiedad acerca la seriedad de este tema. Sin embargo, en la cultura afroamericana existe un amor diferente: "Amor activo". Esta tesis explora el uso del amor activo, sugerido por bell hooks y Martin Luther King, Jr., como una práctica de libertad y una fuerza que se apodera del individuo y de la comunidad. Este estudio se enfoca en las tres novelas siguientes: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* por Zora Neale Hurston, *Sula* por Toni Morrison y *The Women of Brewster Place* por Gloria Naylor. En cada una de estas novelas el amor activo brinda poder y libertad a los personajes y sus comunidades.

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Chapter I

More Than a Feeling: Introduction to Love as a Liberating Strategy

Black creative art is an act of love which attempts to destroy
estrangement and elitism..

Joyce A. Joyce

Love. The word itself has become a cliché; literary works dealing with it run the risk of being presumptively categorized as sentimental fiction. In academia there is an uneasiness surrounding the topic. Since love is a subjective emotion, formerly precious few people considered it worthy of scholarly or professional study, though more recently there has been an explosion of interest in the topic. Scholars in the 1970's and 80's, like Julia Kristeva, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, C.S. Lewis, Leslie A. Fiedler, and Michel Foucault, among others have explored the uses of love and its meaning. Love has many definitions and purposes in literature that make it an important topic in literary studies worthy of the sustained reconsideration now underway. Diane Ackerman, in her book *A Natural History of Love*, goes on to explore the word *love* and how it is practiced.

Love. What a small word for an idea so immense and powerful
it has altered the flow of history, calmed monsters,
kindled works of art, cheered the forlorn, turned tough
guys to mush, consoled the enslaved, driven strong women
mad, glorified the humble, fueled national scandals,
bankrupted robber barons, and made mincemeat of kings.

(xviii)

Although Ackerman's idea of love is very broad and could very well raise some points for exploration, she acknowledges that love is a very powerful force for change in society and in individuals. Potentially, therefore, love can serve as an agent for promoting social change and as such this will be the focus of this thesis. However, let us explore various other definitions of love from the long forgotten to the more recent.

We will start with Plato, since he is one of the earliest philosophers who focused on defining love and his ideas still have influence today. Most of society directly through study or indirectly through popular culture is familiar with the notion of platonic love. Plato's definition and theories of love are not limited to platonic love. Socrates defined love, in Plato's *Symposium*, as "a desire for the perpetual possession of the good" (qtd. in Amir). In other words, as much as it sounds like a cliché, love is the search for one's better half or possessing

the goodness and beauty of the other. Although, this view of love was intended as a joke, currently in our culture there are many people that remain waiting for "their better half."

Another, important point in Plato's theories of love is that it can occur between any types of beings. It does not have to only occur between heterosexuals it can occur between men, between women, between animals, etc.

This beauty and goodness that Plato talks about is all around us and is a direct connection to immortality. While analyzing love in *Symposium*, the reader will find that it is described as a very tranquil feeling. On the other hand, in *Phaedrus* Plato describes love as so overwhelming that it could lead to a very different non pathological madness. This point is explored in Lydia Amir's "Plato's Theory of Love: Rationality as Passion",

Or it can be, as all creative inspiration is, a divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention. True love is madness of the latter sort and it is highly desirable. When the enlightened spirit finally wrenches itself from the debasing but pervasive influence of the body, it seems to lose all sense of equilibrium. Actually, it is only regaining freedom and the true sanity of man. (6)

In other words, when we truly love we become free of the constrictions of our bodies, mind and society. Although, Plato's definition of love sounds as egocentric and selfish, (especially when he mentions that we want to possess the other's goodness) it is not so: it is just a way of two or more beings complementing each other to receive or regain freedom. We have to love willingly in order to achieve it fully. Many scholars agree with this point and have based their own theories on the notion of love as freedom.

In *The Road Less Travelled*, M. Scott Peck defines love as the following:

the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth... I therefore conclude that the desire to love is not itself love. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely both an intention and an action. (qtd. in hooks 247)

In other words, for Peck love is based on selfless action through which the individual chooses to alter his or her society in a positive way. The African-American cultural critic, bell hooks in "Love as a Practice of Freedom", agrees with Peck's definition. For bell hooks love should be used as a strategy for resistance and liberation in society.

This thesis will explore the use of love as suggested by Scott and hooks as a practice of freedom and as a force that empowers the individual and community. This study will focus on the following three novels: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Toni Morrison's *Sula*, and Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*. These novels were all written by African-American women and published at different stages in the development of African-American literary tradition. Each novel is a love story and, more importantly, each features a different type of love culminating in the empowerment of the individual character and their community.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a story of a woman's search for herself, wisdom, independence and real love through three marriages. Love is seen as a way of liberation and protection. The protagonist, Janie Crawford is a strong, beautiful, and witty woman ready to take on the world. Janie finds a way of being herself with the man she loves and together they care less about the social constructs that surround them. As Susan Meisenhelder argues:

...while *Their Eyes Were Watching God* ...seem[s] [a] celebration of heterosexual love... [it] actually encode[s] sexual inequality and the power of black women to resist that oppression. (1447)

However, if sexual inequalities occur, and by sexual inequalities we mean gender inequalities, it is because that love was not real or complete. As suggested by hooks and Peck, a love that is complete is the one that liberates, as when Janie states that she is home again satisfied with herself and now can "live by comparisons" (Hurston 191) because she doesn't care about others opinions or being compared to others; this self-love helps Janie resist oppression at the end of the novel and empowers other characters in the novel as well who use Janie as a model.

Sula in Toni Morrison's novel is a girl who comes of age by being fearless in exploring life. She partakes of many romantic/sexual encounters, but none is as consistent or profound as her love or bond with Nel, her best friend. The type of love explored in this novel is a sisterly love so powerful that when it is broken it leads to the destruction of the characters. This novel "evokes not only a bond between two lives, but the harsh, loveless, ultimately mad world in which that bond is destroyed" (*Sula* front flap cover).

The Women of Brewster Place is a novel that explores the lives of seven women in Brewster Place, a ghetto that is shut off from the rest of the city by a wall. These women do not start off living in Brewster Place; different circumstances in

the human condition bring them there. The main character is Mattie Michael. After this story of Mattie's arrival the novel continues with the rest of the women and their narratives. Through the stories of these women we can see their growth as individuals, but more importantly as a community-- a community based on the presence of selfless love. When these women learn how to love themselves, each other, and the community they manage to change their situation of being isolated in a rundown neighborhood alienated from the rest of society.

To view love as a practice of freedom is a focus worth taking since a sentimental definition of love does not help or enrich a society. Of note in these novels, is that when the protagonists realize that love empowers-- promoting understanding and helping others--this higher form of love precipitates changes for all. These novels present a love that is important for society as a whole and the individual, because instead of representing love as narcissistic, egocentric, and sentimental they suggest that love can be a form of growth and a strategy for the liberation of individuals and the community at large.

Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World* surveys the "courtly love" tradition from its origins among twelfth-century troubadours in southern France through to the modern-day

consequences of a love. He also explores the representation of love in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Rougemont has a similar understanding of love as form of growth and liberation:

true love, active love, that which seeks the welfare of the Other, designates the supreme end, the fulfillment of the whole person in the act of giving. (6)

He also points out that love has always been related to freedom because "love is freedom itself" (de Rougemont 6). However, this has not always been understood as so.

What many scholars may not be willing to admit or accept is that love is at the same time a commitment to others and that an act of love is commitment to the cause of liberation. Linguist, psychoanalyst, and cultural theorist, Julia Kristeva, explores Sigmund Freud's theory of love in her essay "Freud and Love: Treatment and its Discontents." Kristeva notes that Freud associates love with narcissism.

Freud, as we know, binds the state of loving to narcissism; the choice of the love object, be it "narcissistic" or "anaclitic", proves satisfying in any case if and only if that object relates to the subject's narcissism... personal narcissistic reward (where Narcissus is the subject), or narcissistic delegation...(137)

In other words, for Freud love is a way for the beloved to be idolized and for the lover to adore a reflection of himself. In these novels there are characters that are narcissistic and desire to be idolized, but these are not the main focus. These characters do serve a purpose in terms of assisting the development of the protagonist.

In these novels we find that love is at the same time a commitment to others and that an act of love is commitment to the cause of liberation. As Paolo Freire forcefully insists, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom it must not serve as pretext for manipulation it must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love...if I do not love the world-if I do not love life- if I do not love people I cannot enter dialogue. (90)

But, he goes on to say that "in addition to love in humankind one must also have faith [in humankind]" (90). This can be related to Peck's definition of love mentioned earlier, where he states that love is the will to nurture spiritual growth.

Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins in "Sexual Politics and Black Women's Relationships" reasons that African-American women draw strength and promote social change with the use of love: love for the community, the self, and spiritual love. This can be appreciated in these three novels that feature female main

characters who promote freedom and social change in themselves and their community. Collins cites Katie G. Cannon's suggestion in *Black Womanist Ethics* "that love, community, and justice are deeply intertwined in African-American ethics" (Collins 197). She states that their ideals bring strength to African-American women. For these theorists only love can mold, empower and nourish social change; it can be self love, love between individuals, and/or the love of God.

Even though love has been explored here in the context of reality by these theorists like bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, M. Scott Peck and Paulo Freire, it can also be applied to literature; especially to the works of hooks and Collins. As stated in the epigraph above by Joyce A. Joyce,

Black creative art is an act of love which attempts to destroy estrangement and elitism by demonstrating a strong fondness or enthusiasm for freedom and an affectionate concern for the lives of people, especially Black people.

Black creative art addresses the benevolence, kindness, and the brotherhood that men should feel toward each other.

(Joyce 296-97)

Each of these African-American women authors has used love as a strategy to promote a form of personal and community growth in their novels. Each of the female characters in these novels

reaches a certain empowering freedom for herself and her society.

The achievement of individual freedom, to be who you want to be or can be, is a concept that is seen as a fundamental basis of love as a strategy for freedom. The necessity of personal freedom for social liberation is central to the argument of this thesis. Because the truth is that without selfless love humans can't really progress-- as is abundantly demonstrated in these novels. This is the point of bell hooks' article "Love as a Practice of Freedom": in order to really change this world and ourselves for the better we need love.

Without an ethic of love shaping the direction of our political vision and our radical aspirations, we are often seduced, in one way or the other, into continued allegiance to systems of domination-imperialism, sexism, racism, classism. (243)

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Sula* we can find domination and sexism before the characters learn to love. This is also the case of *The Women of Brewster Place*. Indeed, hooks goes on to state that revolutionary thinkers like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X believed in love and its power, although in different ways. This has also informed Paolo Freire's critical views on praxis and transformation of the world.

For Freire love is much more than a romance, it is a way of achieving healthy relationships between people and with causes, such as freedom for a certain group. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, there are three specific, interrelated concepts that support the statement above. First, "dialogue cannot exist... in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people" (89). Second, "Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (89). Thirdly, Freire affirms that "as an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom..." (90). In order to liberate the oppressed and the oppressors we need to feel, believe and achieve love. We need this to engage in dialogue. How can dialogue really occur if you don't care about the other person? How can you want to be liberated and to liberate others if you do not love? How is an act of freedom and revolution connected to love? Dialogue needs to be a relationship between people and it needs to be achieved in order to humanize the oppressed and oppressors. It needs to be achieved in order to make a difference.

In these novels there are acts that can be mistaken as love, but ultimately we find that these acts really serve as a pretext for manipulation or narcissistic self-adoration. These

texts present characters who only care about themselves like Joe Starks in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Sula's mother in *Sula*, and Basil in *The Women of Brewster Place*, whose actions do not promote any positive social change or liberation.

Activist and revolutionary Che Guevara, who acknowledged the importance of love, states: "true Revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love..." (qtd. in Freire 89). He added that revolution would not be possible without it. If love is not included in the revolution what would happen is that the same system of oppression would be reinstated or revolution would fail because it would not alter the underlying cause of the oppression and discontent. This is especially apparent in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, where Joe Starks starts to develop Eatonville simply to gain importance and power.

A culture without love is one of domination and in the beginnings of these novels such domination is very apparent. The lack of love causes a lot of problems, but later on with the finding or the development of love things improve with the use of it as a practice of freedom. For example, in *The Women of Brewster Place* this is demonstrated with the actual breakdown of a wall. Barriers and social constructs are broken and these women characters grow and become free. Individual women are

made free, but also a community is freed: movements and actions founded on love are the ones successful in transforming society. As bell hooks in her article "Love as a Practice of Freedom" maintains,

[The] civil rights movement transformed society in the United States because it was fundamentally rooted in a love ethic... a revolution built on any other foundation would fail. (244)

She goes on to say that "many people feel unable to love either themselves or others because they do not know what love is" (244). So, there is a need to develop a new definition of love for the society. With this new definition, love can be used to our advantage as individuals and as a community. Also, a new definition of love will allow readers to identify more effectively the acts of love in the chosen novels.

In conclusion, in order to facilitate the process of demonstrating and identifying the use of love as a liberating force for the individual and the community, we will refer to this strategy as "active love," thereby echoing Denis de Rougemont's term. Active love is present in these three novels, but it takes many forms. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* active love is the bond between a man and a woman. In *Sula*, active love takes the form of sisterly bonding and in *The Women of*

Brewster Place it takes the form of a communal love. In all three of the novels active love eventually affects the community. Hence, in the next chapter the different types and forms of active love in this literature will be explored with this paradigm in mind.

Chapter II

Active Love and the Elements of Literature and Life that Contribute to its Development

...literature tends to influence "real life" more than such life
influences it.

Leslie A. Fiedler

As Leslie A. Fiedler states in the epigraph, literature has some bearing on real life and this is why it is so important to acknowledge the importance of active love and its presence in literature. In addition, it is important to look at the influences of real life on our literature that made the inclusion of active love possible, especially in African American literature. In this chapter, along with a discussion of the different forms of active love, we will be exploring the historical events and background that developed further the use of active love. Also, there will be a brief discussion of the differences between active love, romantic love, sensibility and sentimentality in literature.

Both Fiedler and cultural critic, bell hooks approach the fact that there is a lack of the representation of love in our literature. hooks goes even further in her book *All About Love: New Visions*, she argues that our society runs away from the

discussions of love and that these are not taken seriously. She states that,

There are not many public discussions on love in our culture right now. At best, popular culture is one domain which our longing for love is talked about... books are the place where we turn to hear our yearning for love expressed. (xvii)

She goes on to explain that this has changed from time to time and that even when some books talk about love it is mostly a different type of love. The love that is presented mostly in novels and popular culture is a non-active love; a sentimental/romantic love.

In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler explains what has been the role of love in literature; not just in self-help books. Fiedler describes that in the American novel love fills certain needs,

What is called "love" in literature is a rationalization, a way of coming to terms with the relationship between man and woman that does justice, on the one hand, to certain biological drives and, on the other, to certain generally accepted conventions of tenderness and courtesy.. (31)

As mentioned earlier literature has a way of influencing real life and vice a versa, hence society can very well turn to

literature for an understanding and a rationalization of love. Also, literature is fomenting those commonly accepted practices of love; many times without considering whether these are productive.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge that historically, society has felt a need to rationalize love. Great theorists have taken on this project and the public is left with many understandings of love. An area that has had a lot of influence is psychology; theorists like Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and Slavoj Žižek have all interpreted love in different ways. In the previous chapter, Freud and Kristeva's definition of love was discussed. Freud believed that love was a narcissistic strategy to idolize one's self. On the other hand, Lacan and Žižek have a different interpretation and rationalization of love and the relationship between man and woman.

In "The Formulae of Sexuation", Lacan explains the relationship between Man and Woman and has three controversial slogans. The slogans are the following: "Woman does not exist", "Woman is a Symptom of Man", and "there is no sexual relationship". These formulae suggest that Woman is a lesser being than Man. Žižek has studied these formulae and has developed his own theories around it using *Sex and Character* by

the German philosopher Weininger. He is one of the feminists that argue "that the formulae of sexuation constituted the most advance elaboration of the gendered subject" (Myers 79). Basically, Žižek argues that Man cannot exist without Woman, but are different and cannot be symbolized. For Žižek, love is the "ideology of sexual difference. It hides the failed Symbolization. In the end it is not possible to reconcile 'man' and 'woman'" (Myers 92). Hence, love is just a decoy.

Coming back to Fiedler, love in literature is also a way to rationalize and foment certain practices that are accepted by the majority of society. Most of the time, it is a non-active and hyper-romanticized love that does not rely on growth and liberation; but on restrictive feelings and fear. It could be a distraction in order to keep society from changing. However, that view of love and type of love has changed over the years. In the 60's and all the way to the 80's, love was seen as a strategy for liberation. This is especially true for the African American culture, because Martin Luther King, Jr. used and preached about love with a purpose during the civil rights movement; a "love ethic".

During the Civil Rights Movement, King suggested an alternative to violence in the quest for freedom; he suggested a non-violent resistance echoing the teachings and strategy of

Mohandas K. Gandhi. Martin Luther King made it clear in his speeches and writings that in order for this type of resistance to work there had to be love.

At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love. In struggling for human dignity the oppressed people of the world must not allow themselves to become bitter or indulge in the hate campaigns. To retaliate with hate and bitterness would do nothing.. Along the way of life someone must have sense and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can be done only by projecting the ethics of love to the center of our lives. (8)

It is obvious that the love that King was talking about is not in any way romantic and sentimental. He explains that it would be "nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense" (8) and that in Greek philosophy there were actually three words for love; *agape* signifying the "understanding, redeeming good will for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return" (8). Hence, it is a love that is only seeking liberation for all without any egocentric agendas.

Martin Luther King's ideals and strategies were not understood in the beginning, which is why he used the repetition approach. In many of his speeches and writings, King repeats

the importance of understanding the meaning of love and how to use it as a strategy for resistance. In this way, he kept these ideals fresh in the community's mind. However, this ideal, the meaning and the importance of love have been in a way lost in time.

Presently, as hooks mentions in *All About Love: New Visions* and many will acknowledge and observe from the media, love is mixed with cynicism and irrelevance. To us "love is for the naïve, the weak, the hopelessly romantic" (hooks xix). To make this point, hooks uses as an example popular songs like the Beatles' "All you need is love" versus Tina Turner's "What's Love Got to Do with It?" On the other hand, she also points out that our society is a "culture driven by the quest to love" (hooks xxviii) but does not really enlighten on the meaning of love. This is why it is important to point out the real definition and practice of love; it is not a feeling but an action.

If we have an inaccurate definition of love then we will never be able to truly love unless this error is corrected. This can be seen in the chosen novels. When a character chooses to truly love actively another and nurture their spiritual growth she or he is liberated. Examples of this will be discussed in the following chapter.

Active love has many similarities with Erich Fromm's theories of love in *The Art of Loving*. Fromm believed that love was an art and that it requires effort and knowledge. He also believes that many people do not really understand it, but society needs it. Fromm states,

[People] are starved for it; they watch endless numbers of films about happy and unhappy love stories, they listen to hundreds of trashy songs about love- yet hardly anyone thinks that there is anything that needs to be learned about love. (1)

He goes on to explain that this is fomented by certain premises that tend to uphold this attitude. First, most people talk about love as *being in love* instead of *loving*, which means that most people consider that love is solely chance and not action. Secondly, Fromm thinks that many people are confused because they view "the problem of love as a problem of *object*, not the problem of a *faculty*" (Fromm 2). This means that most people think that finding the right person or object to love and to be loved is difficult, but to love is simple.

Another reason why society does not think that there is anything to learn about love is the ideas of falling and staying in love. Fromm explains that many people do not understand that the type of love that is exhilarating because it happens between

two people that let their guard down and involved sexual relations and consummation does not last, because there will come a moment where the exhilaration of the intimacy fades. Hence, if we want love to last we need to treat it as an art and learn about it. Fromm explains,

...if we want to learn how to love we must proceed in the same way we have to proceed if we want to learn any other art, say music, painting, carpentry, or the art of medicine or engineering.

What are the necessary steps in learning an art?

The process of learning an art can be divided conveniently into parts: one, the mastery of theory; the other the mastery of practice...But aside from learning the theory and practice, there is a third factor necessary to becoming a master in any art- the mastery of the art must be a matter of ultimate concern; there must be nothing else in the world more important than the art. (4)

Hence, we can understand that to love and use love takes a lot of time, effort and knowledge; things that most of society is not willing to give because to love does not make you powerful or rich in the mode that most people value.

It is especially interesting that, like hooks, Fromm is trying to step away from the idea of love as a feeling. There

are various points in Fromm's explanations that could be related to hooks' theories and that could have guided hers. For hooks, love should be seen as an action and not a feeling. In addition, she also gives the reader the proper term for our feelings.

Most of us... think of love as a feeling. When we feel deeply drawn to someone, we cathect with them; ...we invest feelings or emotion in them. (5)

This is known as "cathexis". Hence, the image of love presented to us through popular culture is not love at all, but cathexis. Analyzing some famous fictional couples we could find that some of them do not show active love but cathexis, such as Guinevere and Lancelot, Romeo and Juliet, Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, among others. These couples were deeply drawn to each other but lacked the will to put the other before themselves and some of the ingredients proposed by bell hooks in *All about Love*,

To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients—care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication. (5)

Keeping this recipe in mind it should be easier to identify active love in works of fiction and in our lives. However, we need to consider that as love, these terms have various

definitions and interpretations. This is especially true between men and women.

Another point to consider is that if people have an incomplete or different definition of love they can hurt each other. You can't love a person if you are hurting or neglecting them. In other words, love and abuse cannot coexist. A woman cannot say that she loves her daughter if she is making her do dangerous things such as selling drugs or prostitution. A man cannot say he loves his mother but abandons her in a time of great need, like Basil in *The Women of Brewster Place*. We have to understand that to love actively carries a lot of responsibility, because it is not a feeling but an action; a choice.

As a result, hooks maintains that the "lack of an ongoing public discussion and public policy about the practice of love in our culture and in our lives means that we still look to books as a primary source of guidance and direction" (12). For this reason it is important to include and present "active love" in works of fiction. These set an example for society. This is the case with the chosen novels.

As mentioned earlier, in most of our popular culture there is an inaccurate image of love and it is not rightly defined. Most of our books, music and movies show a romanticized,

patriarchal, manipulative relationship between two people that is in the end unhealthy and oppressive for one or both of the parties involved. However, because everybody wants to be loved we believe and are confused by this artificial representation. "[E]verybody wants love, but we remain totally confused about the practice of love in everyday life. In popular culture love is always the stuff of fantasy" (hooks xxiii). The idea of love as a fantasy leads to an interesting question, who mostly writes about love? Men or women?

hooks argues that men are the ones that have theorized about love, because fantasy is their domain where they can create reality. Men write the most books about love and women are the ones that buy them. hooks maintains that in our culture a woman can talk about love only in the romance novels or "from a position of lack, of not having received the love we long for" (xxv); even then she is a suspect of threat to the patriarchal system.

On the other hand, Gloria Naylor in "Love and Sex in the Afro-American Novel" argues that in African American fiction men write about sex, but writing about love is left for the female authors. She states that "now it is the black woman's novels that are held accountable for 'proving' that the Afro-American community contains harmonious and loving couples" (Naylor 26).

Naylor is touching upon something deeper than the question "Who writes about love?" she is exploring the idea of a double consciousness, introduced by W.E. B. Dubois, in African American literature and culture. How are African Americans seen through the eyes of white people? It is the self judgment by the African American writer.

This double consciousness can also be seen in Fiedler when he discusses the novel and its audience. How is the representation of love perceived by the audience? To whom should the novel be directed? Going into the history of the novel, he states,

The moment at which the novel took hold coincides with the moment of the sexual division of labor which left business to the male, the arts to the female- thus laying up for the future the perils of Bovaryism, on the one hand, and on the other, the dictatorship of "what the young girl wants" or, perhaps better, what her father thinks she *should* want. In light of the novel's predominantly female audience, it is scarcely surprising that its ideal theme should be love and marriage, and that its ideal protagonist should be a woman.

(42)

Therefore, we could then agree with both hooks and Naylor because the audience and the protagonist of the novels that

present love are women, regardless of whether it was written by a male or female author. Although, in this thesis all texts are by female writers and neither Naylor or hooks discussed who presents accurately active love.

However, historically speaking an inaccurate representation of love would affect more the woman than the man; since women were and are constantly subjected to degradation, discrimination, and abuse by the opposite sex. This is why a feminist viewpoint is important to open the doors to the understanding of love. bell hooks in her essay, "To Love Again: The Heart of Feminism", explores this point and how in the beginning feminists shunned love. She explains that at the start of the feminist movement it was believed "that female freedom could only happen if women let go their attachment to romantic love" (100).

She goes on to explain how romantic love works and restates the misunderstanding of doing things for love. She writes, Romantic love as most people understand it in patriarchal culture makes one unaware, renders one powerless and out of control. Feminist thinkers called attention to the way this notion of love served the interests of patriarchal men and women. It supported the notion that one could do anything in the name of love: beat people, restrict their movements, even

kill them and call it a "crime of passion," plead, "I loved her so much I had to kill her" (101).

To have only the notion that there is only one type of love, romantic love, is to believe in a love that only serves to provide power for one of the individuals involved and to oppress the other. Now, if society understands active love and practices it, we would no longer have to live with the ideal that

...women being the gender in touch with caring emotions would give men love, and in return men, being in touch with power and aggression, would provide and protect. (101)

An ideal that just served as a pretense for men to control and coerce women, instead society would have a strategy for liberation of oppression and abuse. Society and its individuals would grow. In the words of bell hooks, "love acts to transform domination" (103).

Feminism will serve as the gateway to learning and practicing love. As bell hooks explains in "To Love Again: The Heart of Feminism",

Mutual partnership is the foundation of love. And feminist practice is the only movement for social justice in our society which creates the conditions where mutuality can be nurtured. (104)

This point is apparent in the chosen novels because these female authors were feminists that demonstrated that with the use of active love the protagonists or a whole community of women got the strength to oppose domination and were free.

There are many representations of love in literature, but what distinguishes whether or not it will be considered literary is if it has more sensibility than sentimentalism. Sensibility is the ability to be inclined to feelings and awareness of the other's feelings. At times, it means choosing feelings over reason; however, not to extremes. Sentimentalism is the exaggeration of sensibility. Sentimental literature can be identified when the reader feels a lot of empathy for the characters involved. The "active love" in the novels used for this thesis demonstrates a lot of sensibility rather than sentimentalism. Or does it?

Sentimentalism is a literary manifestation that can be identified because of its inclination to pain. Many scholars have argued that sentimental fiction offers a gateway to liberation for the reader. Others like William Stearns argued that sentimental writing lacks sentiment and is unskilled in expression; that this type of writing is not literary. However, if it's not literary then why is *Uncle Tom's Cabin* so famous?

In contrast, Joanne Dobson in "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature" believes that sentimental fiction has just been misunderstood and should be reevaluated. She argues that there are many famous and canonical authors that "participate [d] ... in the sentimental literary tradition" (265) like Emily Dickinson, Nathaniel Hawthorn, Harriet Beecher Stowe, etc. Dobson believes that sentimental fiction describes human connections in a non discreet manner,

Literary sentimentalism, I suggest, is premised on an emotional and philosophical ethos that celebrates human connection, both personal and communal, and acknowledges the shared devastation of affectional loss. It is not a discreet literary category, as the term *genre* might imply, but rather an imaginative orientation characterized by certain themes, stylistic features and figurative conventions. (266)

It could be argued that with these thoughts Dobson is acknowledging that sentimental fiction is not discreet, that it is a tad exaggerated, but that it is literary nonetheless because it belongs to an emotional and philosophical culture that had something to provide to our literary history; especially in terms of aesthetics and themes.

The common theme in sentimental fiction is the search for bonding and affectional relationships. The degree to which these themes are presented vary by author, hence it is safe to say that some may be perceived as overly or slightly inclined to pain and suffering. This is an important point because it responds to some scholar's comments that sentimental writing lacks sentiment and is unskilled in expression. One has to consider that this is a generalization of a literary genre where some can lack sentiment and others do not. Another important point is that the human sentiments vary from one person to another; therefore, it is not an accurate statement. Joanne Dobson in "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature" makes this point clear; that the relationships in this type of literature are important. She states,

Sentimentalism envisions the self-in-relation; family (not in the conventional biological sense), intimacy, community, and social responsibility are its primary relational modes. This valorization of affectional connection and commitment is the generative core of sentimental experience as mid-nineteenth-century American writers defined it. (267)

Sentimental literature, like sensibility literature, deals with humanity and the relationships between them. The degree to

which the feelings are expressed varies between authors and sensibility literature.

Fiedler also explores sentimentalism in *Love and Death in the American Novel*. He is fascinated by how sentimentalism came to be, how it influenced the novel and how it has changed. For Fiedler, sensibility is within sentimentalism. More importantly, he identifies a Sentimental Love Religion and its importance in the novel. First, he argues that sentimentalism is an invention of the bourgeois and that it was based on economic power and cultural autonomy,

There are two great inventions of the bourgeois, Protestant mind at the moment when it stood, on the one hand, between Rationalism and Sentimentalism, and on the other between the drive for economic power and the need for cultural autonomy. (32)

Fiedler argues that this back and forth between Rationalism and Sentimentalism lead to a movement he calls "The Break-through". In addition, he claims that the Marquis de Sade was its spokesman.

One of the most important points about "the Break-through" was the separation of psychology from philosophy. The second would be the change to inwardness. Fiedler states,

The Break-through is characterized not only by the separation of psychology from philosophy, the displacement of the traditional leading genres by the personal lyric and analytic prose fiction... it is also marked by promulgation of a theory of revolution as a good in itself and, most notably perhaps, by a new concept of inwardness. (32)

This concept of inwardness is referring to the inwardness of the human being. What goes on in our minds and how this affects our life? How our perceptions change with time.

As previously mentioned, Fiedler uses as an example the writer, Marquis de Sade,

In the Marquis de Sade, the Break-through found its most stringent and spectacular spokesman: the condemned man judging his judges, the pervert mocking the normal, the advocate of destruction and death sneering at the defenders of love and life... Whatever has been suspect, outcast, and denied is postulated as the source of good. (34)

Another example of this is the transition between the Enlightenment and Sentimentalism. Fiedler argues that there was a brief time where these two movements co-existed and it was "still possible to pretend that true reason and true feeling, the urgings of passion and the dictates of virtue are identical- and that all are alike manifestations of the orthodox God" (34).

However, he goes on to explain that Sentimentalism yielded to the Romantic and "in a matter of months, Don Juan, enemy of Heaven and the family, has been transformed from villain to hero" (34). Another change occurs and it's that "sensibility, seduction, and suicide haunt its art even before ghosts and graveyards take over..." (Fiedler 38) and he hints that this would not change for a long time.

When discussing the Sentimental Love Religion of the eighteenth century, Fiedler points that certain elements may seem ridiculous,

...but we still live in the Age of the Novel (and of the cinema which is its child), so that no matter how vulgarized the sentimental myth may have become, no matter how smugly we snicker at it, we are somehow still its victims and beneficiaries... [F]or us the "happy ending" is defined once and for all: after many trials, the sacred marriage! (46)

Many could agree that judging from our popular culture, Fiedler speaks the truth and like history our novels are in a way repeating themselves.

Chapter III: Persistent Janie, Sisterly Sula and Communal

Mattie: Active Love in the Novels

Because of these writers, there are more models of how it is possible for us to live, there are more choices for black women to make, and there is a larger space in the universe for us.

Mary Helen Washington

To understand the purpose of love and a good model is extremely important for our society and in the achievement of active love. As previously mentioned, "active" love is the type of selfless love used as a liberating force for the individual and the community from oppression, discrimination, and social constructs. Each of the novels chosen demonstrates active love, although not all of these are lasting. Through love the female characters in each of the novels achieve great things, such as helping each other, breaking down barriers, and healing themselves and others. Throughout the novel these women grow and set an example for the rest of the community and especially the readers. Love is one of the defining characteristics of African-American literature written by women.

Through the exploration of the varieties of active love each of the novels will be discussed in order of publication.

However, main relationships are going to be of special interest. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main focus will be on the use of active love between the main character, Janie, and her third husband, "Tea Cake". Also, her relationship with Pheoby, her best friend, and the rest of the community will be surveyed. In *Sula*, the main relationship explored will be between two girls, Sula Peace and Nel Wright, who share a sisterly love. Finally, in *The Women of Brewster Place* the love of a group of women composed by Mattie, Etta Mae, Lucielia, Kiswana, Cora Lee, Lorraine, and Theresa is explored.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston's novel is about Janie's journey through three marriages and her search for love, self, growth and, more importantly, for freedom. The implications of these marriages and are explored in this novel in terms of the presence and consequences of "active" love but are not fully visible to the protagonist until her third and final marriage and even then her marriage to Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods is not perfect, but the consequences of this relationship and its love do fill the objectives of "active" love. Janie's journey or quest, as some may call it, to the realization and fulfillment of "active" love

for self and the liberation of this character from oppression and social constructs is the central theme.

Written in 1937, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* depicts a world when women had to get married because they did not have many rights and were not free. Getting married for love was basically unheard of, impractical and in any case love came after the couple got married. This is especially so for African American women who were not free and were lower down in the chain of importance like Janie's grandmother, Nanny, states:

'So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up ... but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world...' (14)

This was the social system that was in place within the novel and this is why Nanny marries Janie off to an older and economically stable man; to protect her as much as she can and ensure for Janie a comfortable future. However, one should not assume that love between a man and a woman did not exist or was not possible, Hurston made sure that the reader understood that and its implications.

Janie believes that love will come to her after she marries her first husband and when she realizes that this will not be possible she keeps searching for it. It is almost as if Hurston

is telling the reader to keep searching if she or he has not found love. Not many scholars and writers understood this point during Hurston's time, but later on many did. Some of these have been June Jordan, Alice Walker, Kathleen Puhr, and Darwin Turner. June Jordan wrote in the summary and praise of *Their Eyes* an interesting point.

[*Their Eyes Were Watching God* is]The prototypical black novel of affirmation: it is the most successful, convincing, and exemplary novel of black love that we have. Period. (June Jordan book flap)

She considers that this is an "exemplary novel of black love", which means that Hurston's representation of love existed and that the readers had this as a model for their use.

After Janie finds love she returns to her home in Eatonville and tells her best friend her discoveries and how love has helped her. The reader can understand that should the novel go on after Janie finishes telling her story to Pheoby the rest of the community is going to hear it and follow in her footsteps in the search for "active" love.

Janie Crawford, as a woman is emotionally strong, beautiful, and witty. At a young age she was ready to take on the world if only her Grandmother had not married her off at the age of sixteen. She was married to Logan Killicks an older man

for her protection from poverty. However, he is not of Janie's liking, works her like a dog and is abusive. So, she runs away with another man, Joe Starks, who will become the Mayor of Eatonville; a town founded by African Americans and where the retelling of Janie's story begins. After the death of Joe Starks, Janie is rich and decides to love Tea Cake, a younger man. Janie Crawford surprises many of the other characters in the novel creating a scandal simply by striving for happiness and active love. After Tea Cake's death she returns liberated and tells Pheoby.

As previously mentioned, Janie's tale of her first marriages begins her journey towards empowerment and the realization of active love Janie is married off because her grandmother wants financial security for her and Janie is led to believe that after a while she will learn to love Logan. "Nanny and the old folks had said it... Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant" (21). In fact, she is so preoccupied with this that after two months she goes to ask her grandmother for pointers on how to love Logan to no avail. Nanny, Janie's grandmother, believes that Janie is being foolish and instructs her to forget about love and be thankful for her financial future. In other words, to be thankful that

she has protection and not a love that fades or in Nanny's eyes offers no benefit.

Lawd have mussy! Dat's the prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love! Dat's just whut's got us pullin' and haulin' and sweatin' and doin' from can't see in de mornin' till can't see at night. Dat's how come de ole folks say dat bein' uh fool don't kill nobody. It jus' makes you sweat. (23)

There are many interpretations to this reply by Nanny. First, she is arguing that many women get blinded by romantic love and then suffer by being the slave of some man that will probably leave her or oppress her. Secondly, Nanny could also be referring to sex instead of love, which given the times can also lead to suffering and slavery. In Nanny's eyes because Janie does not love Logan, she will have less suffering to endure.

However Janie's first marriage is far from the paradise that Nanny believes. At first Logan Killicks does everything for Janie but as time goes by he hints that she should be working alongside him in the fields and goes to purchase a second mule so Janie can use the plow with him. This is also when Killicks starts verbally abusing Janie. He shows his true colors and why he wanted to marry Janie; reassurance of his status and a young wife. Janie learns "that marriage did not

make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (25). Janie loses her child-like innocence and starts to see the world for what it really is, looking at the horizon in hope for change.

Shortly after this incident, Joe Starks walks into Janie's life bringing a shimmer of hope. Janie sees the opportunities that she could have with Joe and the assurance of adventure and love that she yearns for. The reader must remember that at the time Janie got married to Logan Killicks she was only sixteen years old and highly disappointed with the turn her life had taken. So, when Joe shows up with all his big dreams and sweet talk Janie is curious. However, she does feel a duty to Logan and was going to stay with him if he had not told her that she was spoiled and needed to be humbled. As Sally A. Ferguson mentions in "Folkloric Men and Female Growth in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*",

When he buys a second plow- thus revealing his plans to make Janie the dreaded mule Nanny warned against-, Janie runs off with another man. Her rebellious behavior signals her early determination to defend herself against assaults on her giving and loving nature. Her rebellion is analogous to that of an actual mule later in the novel- a dumb animal that stubbornly refuses until death to submit to an even

dumber man. In escaping from Logan, Janie foreshadows her ability to triumph over patriarchal oppression throughout her life. (187)

Janie saw that if she stayed with Killicks, he would eventually turn into one of the men that her Grandmother warned against even if he had money, because the patriarchal ideals were already embedded in him. Running off with and marrying Joe Starks, does not guarantee Janie freedom, love or happiness, but it does guarantee that she would have opportunities, see the horizon and would not be turned into a mule. She was willing to take the risks of exploring and loving Joe Starks.

In the beginning Janie's second marriage seemed fine to her. She admired Joe Starks and he gave her everything which made her believe that he loved her such as marriage, position, and new clothes. However, soon enough she discovers that Joe Starks is far from perfect and that he makes others suffer for his flaws. An example of this is Joe's ability to talk down to others and his inability to listen to Janie. It becomes clear that Joe does not truly love Janie; he loves himself and the advantages of having Janie as a wife. Janie is his "trophy wife", she is beautiful and men desire her. She adores him and she is something that he can empower. As Carl Jung said, "where the will to power is paramount, love is lacking" (qtd. in hooks

40). Janie is greatly disappointed. This marriage can be used as an example of the things some women go through in the search for love and having a misrepresentation of it in society. As bell hooks states in "To Love Again: The Heart of Feminism",

Many of these women felt betrayed by the promise of love and living happily ever after when they entered marriages with men who swiftly transformed themselves from charming princes into patriarchal lords of the manor. (100)

Joe (Jody) Starks was Janie's prince charming with his "big voice" and "he spoke of far horizon... change and chance." Unfortunately, Janie did not count on being molded into a trophy that others had to look up to and a wife that had no voice. An example of this was the grand opening party at the store and Jody tells Janie to "dress up" and that she "must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang" (41). To look on herself as the bell-cow, is to see herself as the lead cow of the herd.

So now Janie instead of turning into a mule is turned, as she says, into a bell-cow, but she is persistent. Furthermore, judging by the conversations of the townspeople in front of the store, the whole town of Eatonville knows that Joe only "loves obedience out of everybody" (49) and especially of Janie; yet,

the town does nothing. As bell hooks explains in *All About Love*,

A commonly accepted assumption in a patriarchal culture is that love can be present in a situation where one group or individual dominates another. (40)

Hence, because Janie is turned into a bell-cow by having a lot of possessions and staying with Joe, everybody thinks that they love each other. The grand opening party was just the beginning and the less serious of Janie's woes while married to Joe and she quickly realizes that she has no other option than to stick to it and bid her time. She was being oppressed by her own chosen husband because "he wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it" (71), even resorting to physical violence. For Janie the marriage was dead. From this experience she learns to pick her fights and how she can be "free" in her mind. She ceased to express her mind and feelings to Joe and kept them away from him.

Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (72)

Janie still hopes that she will find fulfilling love and that with time she will be able to defend herself from Joe. She now

knows who she is and when the right time comes, she defends herself in front of a lot of people in the store. Joe is humiliating her again and she got tired and did the same he had done for years; she humiliates him.

Humiliated by Janie, Joe falls sick making the whole town talk about Janie. Later on, when he dies she is also blamed. None of the town's people remembered how badly Joe Starks really treated her and as if they did they did not care, because for the community they understood that was the way that love should be. However, before Joe dies Janie explains to him a few important points,

Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut's left after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was... Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me... and now you got tuh die tuh find out dat you got tuh pacify somebody besides yo'self if you wants any love and any sympathy in dis world. (86-87)

This last conversation that Janie wants to have with Joe shows the reader that Janie had in fact loved Joe and that she knows the kind of love she wants and that is necessary to survive in this world; active love. Joe does not take this well and

finally dies leaving Janie free and rich. Up to this point Janie had not articulated her need for a rejuvenating active love.

Also, as Ferguson explains in "Folkloric Men and Female Growth in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", Janie needs to get rid of all the bitterness and anger that has accumulated through those years of marriage. Ferguson believes that,

By exorcising those negative attitudes bred through the long, degrading years when Jody Starks alternately ignored and ridiculed her, Janie cleanses herself of any hostilities that could leave her too bitter to love again.

(191)

This is exactly what happens in the novel; Janie is able to move on and is at peace. In time she finds the type of love she yearns for in Tea Cake.

Janie's affair and marriage to Tea Cake happens fast and none of the town's people approve mainly for three reasons. First, the town's people already had potential suitors for Janie and she did not choose any of them. Second, Tea Cake does not have money and he may be out to get Janie's money. Third, and most significant, Janie is much older than Tea Cake and should not be running around like some young gal. When discussing this with Pheoby, Janie gets frustrated and states that "Now they got to look into me loving Tea Cake and see whether it was done

right or not! They don't know if life is a mess of corn-meal dumplings, and if love is a bed quilt!"(6). In other words, Janie believes that the rest of the town is criticizing her without knowing what life and love are.

Although, Janie's marriage to Tea Cake was not a perfect example of the use of "active love" it does provide a lot of the freedom needed in Janie's life and sets in motion Janie's spiritual and empowering growth. In fact, in their life together there were only two incidents that were at odds with active love. The first incident was when Tea Cake took two hundred dollars from Janie and disappeared for a whole day just to see what it felt like to spend so much money. He did not include her in his wanderings and entertainment leaving her sick with worry. Second, Tea Cake resorted to violence just to prove to the neighbor that Janie belonged to him.

Now according to bell hooks, love cannot exist in the presence of violence so in this case then Tea Cake does not really love Janie for who she is. On the other hand, hooks also acknowledges that many men are taught that the way to love is to overpower and Tea Cake did just that, but deep down he knows it's wrong. During these times Tea Cake and other men had certain social roles that were at odds with love such as the misguided idea that men should not express their feelings, they

needed to be strong, that they needed to prove their manhood, and so on. He took the money and, later on, slapped her to prove his manhood. Tea Cake asks Janie to work alongside him because he misses her and it took a lot for him to express this to her. More importantly, hooks acknowledged that to really love is not an easy feat, is at many times confusing and requires work. Both men and women had to change their perceptions of love and the imposed social roles. This is not a justification of Tea Cake actions, but the reader can sense that he is trying and is confused. For example, during both occasions where Tea Cake's actions were at odds with active love he regrets it, apologizes to Janie and never repeats the action. After Tea Cake slaps her, immediately "he petted and pampered her as if he had nearly killed her" (147) and both the men and women that watched did not understand. Who is to say that if Tea Cake would not have died prematurely, he and Janie would not have achieved active love?

It is because of Tea Cake that Janie learns who she really is. He gives her the love that she needs to explore and learn about herself; she is fully free to be herself, to grow and he loves her just as she is.

Despite all his faults, Janie loves Tea Cake because of his attractive physical appearance-"like the love thoughts of

women" (161)-and, more importantly, because of his ability to love her- "He could be a bee to a blossom" (161). Tea Cake expresses this love by glorying in Janie's beauty and encouraging her to realize her own abilities. (Ferguson 192)

Together they break the social constructs about love and the roles that men and women are forced to fulfill in society. For example, Tea Cake teaches Janie many things that were not thought appropriate for women such as fishing, playing checkers, shooting and hunting, and to feel free to express her mind again.

Tea Cake values Janie's opinions and feelings. An example of this is when he comes home from working at the muck just to be with her because he misses her and asks her to work beside him,

"You don't think Ah'm tryin' tug git outa takin' keer uh yuh, do yuh, Janie, 'cause Ah ast yuh tuh work long side uh me?" Tea Cake asked her at the end of her first week in the field.

"Ah naw, honey. Ah laks it. It's mo' nicer than settin' round dese quarters all day. Clerkin' in dat store wuz hard, but heah, we ain't got nothin' tuh do but our work and come home and love." (133)

In fact, he loves and respects her so much that he is even willing to leave everything for her, to help out around the house and saves her on multiple occasions during the hurricane. "Imbued with a heroic nature resistant to societal conventions, Tea Cake exhibits a freedom of spirit so assured of its own self-worth that he consequently cannot deny a similar feeling to the woman he loves" (Ferguson 193). He wants Janie to be free to be herself.

When Tea Cake dies, the presence of active love in Janie's life is complete because by this time Janie has realized that she knows who she is, and what she is capable of, even if it's protecting herself from the man she loves. She's stronger and even though she is grief stricken, "Janie held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service" (184). It is sad that Tea Cake dies, but the love that he gave Janie and the effects will not be lost. In *All about Love*, bell hook discusses that

When one knows a true love, the transformative force of that love lasts even when we no longer have the company of the person with whom we experienced profound mutual care and growth. Thomas Merton writes: "We discover our true selves in love." (187)

This is exactly what happens to Janie and now she can go back to Eatonville. Janie goes back home because she "done been tuh the horizon and back and now... live by comparisons" (191).

When Janie tells her story to Pheoby, she opens the space for dialogue and understanding about active love to the rest of the community. This novel is thus opened to different interpretations, but many would agree with Missy Dehn in "Save De Text" when she states that "her [Janie's] crucial frame concerns her return to community and resultant possibility for communal as well as personal growth" (54). As Janie maintains,

"Dey [the community]gointuh make 'miration 'cause mah love didn't work lak they love, if dey ever had any. Then you must tell 'em dat love ain't somethin' lak uh grindstone dat's de same thing everywhere and do de same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea... it takes its shape from de shore it meets, it's different with every shore." (191)

She has found her own way to get a little love and, as the reader can understand, she is going to show the rest of the town. Hurston made clear that many have to learn to love and that love affects everybody in a different way. If it's true and equal, love will lead to freedom and growth of both the

individual and the community. The necessary mechanism for individual growth within a community is love.

Sula

In Toni Morrison's *Sula* active love develops within the setting of a friendship, and it is fleeting. More importantly, the consequences of lack of active love are clear. This novel is more about the absence of active love and the implications this had on the African American community as whole and certain individuals within that community. However, the friendship/love between these two female characters Sula and Nel, while it lasted, is of great importance for their development and their freedom. It is only at the end that Nel acknowledges the importance of this active love. The love in this novel is between two girls; one named Nel Wright and the other Sula Peace in a town known as the Bottom.

Although this novel is named after one of the characters, both little girls and, later on, women are important because the true plot of the novel is their relationship. Also, Nel is narrating part of the story and Sula has been dead for a while. Sula and Nel could not come from more conflicting backgrounds, but they could not be more identical in terms of mind. These two girls go through many experiences together, from their

dreaming about each other before they meet to accidentally drowning a little boy. Both girls love, idolize and admire each other. In a way, Nel wants to be Sula and Sula wants to be Nel. Also, running the risk of a cliché, the girls could complete each other, merging into one strong, feminine and independent woman. However, as they get older the bond that these two women share starts to falter because of social pressures. Sula wants freedom and independence to explore the world and Nel wants or feels that she should get married and have children, thus filling the traditional mold of a woman during the 1920's. Sula leaves the Bottom and has adventures. After a decade, Sula returns to a town that is scared of her. Things with Nel start to normalize until Sula has sex with Nel's husband, Jude. They speak again on Sula's deathbed and it is only at the end that both realize the importance of the love they lost. In this way, at least one of the characters may grow and be free.

There are many interesting things to explore in this novel that correlate with active love. There is a lack of love but an over-abundance of death, real and metaphorical. The time frame of the plot begins between the two World Wars and ends right at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement. Lastly, there are various ideals on the importance of a mother's love and the effects this has on the children.

The novel starts with a description of the Bottom in Medallion, Ohio and its disappearance; followed by a depiction of violence and death in a war zone. Right from the beginning the reader can notice the lack of love in this town where there is actually a "National Suicide Day". When introduced to Helene Wright, Nel's mother, the lovelessness continues because we find out she really never does know love and does not love her daughter. She "loved her house and enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband" (20), but since she did not know love as a child or as a woman she cannot share love with her daughter. Nel on the other hand does have a certain self-love in the beginning of the novel that will ultimately help her meet and befriend Sula at the age of ten.

Sula comes from a different background, her mother is not strict or demanding and she lives in a house that is always in turmoil with her grandmother Eva. Like Nel, Sula's mother Hannah does not truly love her daughter and Sula also is self-loving. In fact, the only example of love that Sula witnesses in her home as a child is, as stated in the novel, that the Peace women "love maleness". As demonstrated in the novel this could be understood in two ways: Sula's grandmother Eva, loves the conversations and non-sexual activities that she can perform with them and Hannah loves having sex with men without the

emotional strings of a relationship. However, neither of these models are active love and only serve as a catalyst for the identification of active love. This is the environment where Sula and Nel begin their friendship.

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison comments on the extent of "Mother love". Eva, Hannah and Helene are the main examples of mother figures in this novel, but the reader can observe countless others in the Bottom. In *Sula*, mothers are willing to make great sacrifices for their children like Eva. Like Hannah, they are able to "love" their children because they have to, but there is no need to like them. Finally, mothers like Helene use their children to show off to others and to manipulate them.

Besides the "love of maleness", Sula has a distorted view of Mother love and is for the rest of her life affected by this. The first incident that affects her perspective is when Eva burns her youngest son named Plum, who is slowly killing himself with heroin and rapidly turning into a baby. The second incident affects Sula even more, she is in a way traumatized and deeply hurt when she overhears Hannah conversing with some friends,

Hannah smiled and said, "Shut your mouth. You love the ground he pee on."

"Sure I do. But he still a pain. Can't help loving your own child. No matter what they do."

"Well, Hester grown now and I can't say love is exactly what I feel."

"Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference." (57)

Sula was bewildered by this and she copes by deepening her friendship with Nel, who pulled "her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" (57).

In "The Tripled Plot and Center of Sula", Maureen Reddy discusses the friendship between both girls, the presence of death in this novel and their search for freedom. She explains that,

The Sula/Nel couple-the two sides of a "Janus' head" that together would make one woman (Parker 253)-are the center of the plot about female friendship and female development and represent the effects of internalized racist stereotypes and the multiple oppression of black women.

(31)

Reddy points out that both Sula and Nel are, probably along with every other woman of the community, being oppressed.

Furthermore, the reader can judge that this community as a whole is suffering from oppression and no means of coping with it.

This is why it seems that death is the only way to achieve freedom for some of the characters; they do not know active love. They are limiting their growth. Hence, Shadrack, a war veteran that cannot cope with war invents the National Suicide Day, a day devoted to getting death out of the way so "the rest of the year would be safe and free" (14).

Nel and Sula share a lot of things in common and together through their active love for each other these girls grow. They dreamt of each other before even meeting, hence it is easy to theorize that together they would make one woman and that where one has a weakness the other has strength.

Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on... Their friendship was intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other's personality. (52-53)

According to C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*, many do not consider Friendship as a manifestation of love. Lewis considers it a type of love. He states that "[Friendship] is essentially between individuals; friends ... have in some degree drawn apart together from the herd" (58). As a result of this active love

and relationship, Sula and Nel drew apart from the rest of the community and could bear their childhood in a place filled with hopelessness. As bell hooks explains in *All about Love*, "we... look to friends for care, respect, knowledge, and all around nurturance of our growth that we did not find in the family" (133). Ironically, Nel was the one with a strong character when they were children, but after she marries Sula becomes the one with a strong character that everybody in the Bottom scorns and fears.

Sula, as a child, was always a little odd and demonstrated her love for Nel in particular, often misguided ways. For example, when Nel was bullied by four white boys Sula decided to defend her by scaring the boys,

Sula squatted down in the dirt road and put everything down on the ground... Holding the knife in her right hand, she pulled the slate toward her and pressed her left forefinger down hard on its edge. Her aim was determined but inaccurate. She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh... Sula raised her eyes to them. Her voice was quiet. "If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?" (54-55)

Her active love for Nel and her well being is worth the physical pain for Sula. This is what she has learned from Eva, that in order to have money to feed her children put her leg in the railway to get insurance money. Sula just wants to defend her friend from oppression. Although, active love does not require self-mutilation we can see that Sula's love for Nel is very strong since she was willing to sacrifice her comfort for the well being of her friend.

As they grow they are surrounded by death, racism, sex and oppression, but their active love creates a sort of escape. However, it is these things that start to create a wedge in their relationship and make them take different roads. Nel marries right after graduation and, by losing Nel and not wanting to surrender to the traditional roles of women, Sula leaves the Bottom for ten years in order to get a college education and freedom. Nevertheless, because of their separation, neither one of them continues growing or is really free.

Jude Greene chose to marry Nel for various self-centered and egotistical reasons that Nel does not acknowledge. Maureen Reddy explains it in "The Tripled Plot and Center of *Sula*",

The mothering Jude expects from Nel is of a more complicated variety, but it is mothering nonetheless. Jude

marries Nel when his hopes of proving his masculinity through building the New River Road are dashed by racist hiring policies... When he realizes that he is permanently barred from such work due to race, he turns to Nel for solace. Morrison is explicit about Jude's motives for marrying: ". . . it was rage, rage and a determination to take on a man's role anyhow that made him press Nel about settling down..." (82)... In turn, Nel marries Jude because she realizes that he needs her; that is, she colludes in the eradication of her self in a marriage in which she is meant to be a part of Jude. (34)

Nel in marrying Jude loses herself, even though she wanted the opposite. Nel liked "this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly" (84). Jude knows that Nel will form part of him and without a fight. "Except for an occasional leadership role with Sula, she had no aggression. Her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or sputter she had" (83). It is only with Sula that Nel shines and is free to be herself.

Sula in a way losing her friend leaves to seek freedom elsewhere and go to college. This is explored by Karen Stein in "Toni Morrison's Sula: A Black Woman's Epic",

Nel's marriage separates her from Sula, who alone, of all the women in the Bottom, rejects the limits, the obligations and restrictions, of marriage and motherhood. Viewing marriage as compounded of convenience and caution, Sula avoids such ties. While her repudiation of these bonds renders her an outcast in the eyes of her community, she perceives herself as free, and therefore able, as none of the other women are, to be honest and to experience life and self fully. Her journey is the enactment of that freedom. (147-48)

Nonetheless, she is unsuccessful and in ten years returns to the Bottom a cynic that everybody dislikes and thinks of as evil. Nel is the only one that likes Sula, but all that changes when Sula has sex with Jude.

Sula had sex with Jude because she was bored and felt she needed to fill a void. She does not see the inappropriateness of this action because Nel is her best friend that loves her and they used to share everything. She never expected the consequences that this act has on their friendship and future.

Accusing Sula of disloyalty, Nel remains aloof, although she thinks of her friend often. Without Sula and Jude, with her children growing away from her as they grow up, Nel's life contracts even further, narrowing into a loveless

round of duties and responsibilities, to job, children, and church. (Stein 148)

Nel is not the only one affected by this separation, Sula now fully becomes the scapegoat for all the bad things that happen in the Bottom. Hence, the active love that these two characters shared when they were growing up was ironically lost with the start of a marriage.

Sula and Nel do not speak or see each other again for three years. Nel out of curiosity visits Sula on her deathbed and it does not end well.

Sula implies that it is Nel herself who has been the traitor. For when Nel married Jude, she severed the ties of friendship that bound the special relationship between the two girls and grounded Sula in the human community. Without Nel, Sula becomes an outsider. (Stein 148)

When Nel leaves she is convinced that Sula never cared for her and that she is the victim. She does not accept fault or the reality that Jude never loved her, but she does doubt her position. After this Sula dies and, according to Reddy, she does so "because death seems her only option for freedom" (32). It is fascinating that even after she is dead she is thinking of Nel and of telling her that dying does not hurt. Therefore, the reader does understand that Sula did in fact actively love Nel

and that the consequences of losing their active love were dreadful.

Sula became an outsider and shuns love after her fight with Nel. She never truly loves a man or a woman. Because she mocks the traditional roles of women she leads a loveless life and dies alone. Reddy points out that,

Sula, though, rejects not only external limitations but also love and community, thereby severely restricting her own potential for growth, engaging in a personal war with the world. Unloved and unloving, dead finally of a mysterious wasting disease similar to those that punished unconventional nineteenth-century heroines, Sula is the hero of the novel, a solitary seeker trying to make her own self. (43)

She never grows or becomes fully free because of the lack of active love. Hortense Spillers in "A Hateful Passion, a Lost Love" explains that like the community of the Bottom, the reader also loves and hates Sula because she forces the acceptance of the "corruption of absolutes" (Spillers 295). In other words, Sula forces the reader and the community to take a look at their realities and to be careful of judgments. This happens to Nel at the end of the novel.

It is only after Sula dies, twenty four years later and at the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, that Nel realizes that she was also at fault in the breakage of their relationship and that all that time she had always loved Sula.

"All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "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 (174).

The reader may acknowledge that that something that Nel is explaining is that she now realized her friendship with Sula was the relationship that mattered most. As Toni Morrison explained, Sisterhood was so critical among black women because there wasn't anybody else... We saved one another's lives for generations. When I was writing *Sula*, I was talking about a relationship that fell apart, because I wanted the reader to miss it. (qtd. in Nance, 51)

The reader, like Nel, misses the relationship and understands the importance of it. Morrison's objective is not lost. Also, now that Nel is enlightened she is free to grow. As Reddy states that "Nel may now grow, freed from the lies in which she

has held herself prisoner, and may discover the inner peace that has thus far eluded her" (38).

Inner peace is what Toni Morrison wants the reader to miss and to see that the lack of active love has consequences. Two women's lives were ruined when they ceased to love actively and followed the rest of the community in a path of hopelessness. *Sula* is Morrison's act of love for a society that has been oppressed for a long time and has forgotten the active love needed to achieve true peace, growth and freedom.

The Women of Brewster Place

In this novel the consequences of active love are more visible because it demonstrates how active love is achieved and used not only in an individual setting, but within a community. In the seven stories that form this novel, active love and its implications are visible, but in a subtle way that can be examined in each individual story or as a whole novel. The actual word "love" is not often mentioned in the novel, but the reader can see it through the actions of these female characters.

Active love is visible through the actions of Mattie Michael, the constant character in the novel; she is present in all the stories. Through active love these female characters

achieve great things, such as helping each other, breaking down barriers, and healing themselves and others. Throughout the novel these women grow and set an example for the rest of the community and especially the readers. For example, when Mattie has no place to stay, Miss Eva gives her food and shelter for years making her part of her family. According to Kathleen Puhr's article, "Healers in Gloria Naylor's Fiction", various African American authors have used love in their novels but "in particular, Naylor has celebrated the power of love as a force that heals, bringing peace and wholeness" (Puhr 518). Very few authors have the definition, idea and the representation of "active" love in their works; Naylor is one of them. She uses love as a liberating force for the female characters in this novel.

This is clear with the image of the community in this novel and can be taken as an example of how literature and reality complement each other. As stated in the previous chapter, during the times that these novels were published the African American population was struggling and tearing down barriers of oppression. Hence, a text like this could give hope and strength to its readers, especially women. As demonstrated in the novel, these women for the most part were selfless in

sharing their love; "Their love drove them to fling dishcloths in someone else's kitchen to help him make the rent..." (5).

As it is presented in this novel, women are the ones that use the power of love to help each other, because they need to. If it were not for their willingness to love, they would just be women stuck in a rundown street "since they came because they had no choice" (4), suffering from oppression, loneliness and abuse from a city that has put them there and forgotten them. As Puhr states,

The company of women, as Naylor presents it in her fiction, evolves by necessity and triumphs through courage and love. If Nikki Giovanni is correct in asserting that "Black love is Black wealth," Naylor's characters are rich indeed.

(526)

Therefore, because they have the courage to go on and love actively they have accomplished a lot in their lives at Brewster Place. By these women doing so, they have become the richest generation of women that has passed through Brewster Place and made the place better for the generations to come.

Throughout the novel there are many examples of the power of active love. One of the most memorable is an incident between Kiswana Browne and Cora Lee. Kiswana is the daughter of a middle-class family that wants to find herself by living alone

in Brewster Place. She is also searching for a way to be active in the struggles for equality and improvement in their culture and community. On the other hand, Cora Lee is a woman that while growing up was infatuated with baby dolls and now as an adult likes to have babies and loses interest once they grow up. She likes to watch a lot of television, has a baby and six kids running all over Brewster Place. When these two residents meet, Kiswana does not give up on Cora Lee's ability to be a responsible, caring and loving mother. We can see this in the following lines,

Kiswana seemed reluctant to move. "You know, there's a lot of good things that go on in the park too." She pulled a leaflet out of her pocketbook. "My boyfriend's gotten a grant from the city and he's putting on a black production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this weekend. Maybe you could come and bring the children," she offered, barely hopeful...

"Okay, I'll bring them, but you don't have to stop by. I'll manage alone, I'm used to it."...

"Okay, then I'll wait and stop by for you on my way out..."

(118-19)

Instead of ignoring or judging Cora Lee, Kiswana keeps offering the help, friendship and active love that give rise to Cora Lee's growth and acknowledgement of her worth as a woman and as

a mother. After this episode, Cora Lee takes her kids to see Shakespeare and at the same time decides that they are going to need all her help and love to improve themselves as individuals and as a family. She aspires for her children to dream and be somebody; maybe even one of them could be the first black Shakespeare.

It is clear that because of active love for a fellow woman, Cora Lee improves as a woman & mother; a love that came from a total stranger. Kiswana Browne shows that real active love is meant to be shared regardless of familiarity or situation, because real active love is one that nurtures, helps, liberates, and improves another's situation. This is real active love; a love that, even if it is little by little, is improving the circumstances of these women in Brewster Place. As bell hooks explains, "there is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community" (129).

Another example of the use of active love in an individual is the character Mattie Michael. Mattie is sort of a mother to most of the women in Brewster Place and she is highly respected. On more than one occasion, Mattie uses active love to help the other women. She helps her best friend Etta Mae acknowledge that there are more important things in life than a man and that Mattie is her real love. Etta Mae, thinking of Mattie worrying

and waiting up for her, "laughed softly to herself as she climbed the steps toward the light and the love and the comfort that awaited her" (74). Another example is when Mattie helps Lucielia overcome the death of her daughter. Lucielia was giving up on life and Mattie does not let her. In "Healers in Gloria Naylor's Fiction" Puhr writes that,

Lucielia, enervated as if in a trance during her child's funeral, succumbs to Mattie's ministrations as Mattie restores her to the world of the living... Mattie the healer extracts the splinter, rooted in slavery and sexual oppression, helping Lucielia to enter a new life. (520)

Mattie saves Lucielia's life and gives her a new life. She hugs her and loves her until Lucielia lets go of her anger and grief. Mattie's love of Lucielia came easy since she is the one that raised her, but she is the same with the rest of the women in Brewster Place; her love is available to them equally. As hooks maintains, "the values that inform our behavior, when rooted in a love ethic, are always the same for any interaction" (136).

More importantly, is that Mattie's view on love has very little to do with sex. Mattie believes that there is strength and power in love and it does not matter what sexual preferences one has. Critic Larry Andrews approaches this in his article "Black Sisterhood in Gloria Naylor's Novels",

What Mattie comes to realize, through the insight of her own experience, is that the deep bond she has felt with women may have a wholeness and power (including the sensual) comparable to that of the lesbians and perhaps superior to any relationship that seems possible with a man in the distorted world of black relations. (qtd. in Woodard)

For Mattie, love has very little to do with sex or sexual preferences. This can be further demonstrated in the novel when Mattie is discussing love with Etta Mae:

Mattie was thinking deeply. "Well, I've loved women, too. There was Miss Eva and Ciel, and even as ornery as you can get, I've loved you practically all my life... I've love some women deeper than I ever loved any man," Mattie was pondering. "And there been some women who loved me more and did more for me than any man ever did.. Maybe is not so different...deep down is not so different after all." (141)

Gloria Naylor in her article "Love and Sex in the Afro-American Novel", approaches this idea of the differences between love and sex in literature. For Naylor, there is a lack of representations of love in African American literature and more freedom in the representations of sex. She makes this clear when she states that "sex is sex, and love is something else

again" (26) and exposes that questions have come up about the lack of love in the "Afro-American tradition".

Also, it is clear that this is a question that Naylor has thought about and wishes to act upon, since in her novel there are only two actual incidents of the sexual act. Both of these incidents have negative and violent outcomes. In the first one Mattie gets pregnant, is beaten by her father and loses her family. The second incident is the rape of one of the female characters that results in the victim's mental and physical trauma, fear throughout the community and in the death of an innocent man. By having a lack of sex in her novel, Naylor made sure that she wrote about different types of love.

This is not to say that Naylor's novel is perfect in the presentation of love as a strategy for liberation, or that all her representations of love are "active love". There are instances in the novel that demonstrates non-active love or a love that has stopped bringing fulfillment and goodness to the parties involved. This is the case with "The Two", as they call them in the novel. Their names were Theresa and Lorraine, new tenants in Brewster Place and also the new subject of interest since they were lesbians. The reader is hinted that at one time these two women loved each other deeply and that their love was active love. However, with the passing years and struggles that

they had to face, as a consequence for being lesbians, their love has become strained. An example of this can be seen in the following passage, where Theresa is realizing that they and their love have changed,

Lorraine was changing. It wasn't exactly anything she had said or done, but Theresa sensed a firmness in her spirit that hadn't been there before...Why did that bother her? Didn't she want Lorraine to start standing up for herself?... What nagged at Theresa more than the change was the fact that she was worrying about it. She actually thought about picking a fight just to see how far she could push her- push her into what? Oh, God, I must be sick, she thought. (155)

This is where the reader starts to notice that the love between these two women has become non-active and is beginning to fade. More importantly, these women are changing, losing themselves and hurting each other because of this fading relationship. Later, during an argument Lorraine realizes that if she can't leave the apartment without Theresa "there'll be nothing left in me to love you" (167). This relationship is something that she wants to hold on to, but is getting more difficult not to lose herself on the way.

Another example of non-active love is Lucielia's love for Eugene, because it is a one way street. Eugene does not love Lucielia or even their daughter, Serena. He only cares about his needs for spending money, independence and manhood. Eugene is always picking fights with Lucielia and verbally abusing her. He even tells her that her love is not good enough. As a consequence, Lucielia loses much more than herself; she gets an abortion and, in the struggle to keep him, she loses her baby girl in an accident. Her love for Eugene, instead of giving her liberation and fulfillment, only brings suffering and death.

In writing about love, Naylor made sure that love has a purpose. She separated from the romantic ideals of love and instead she concentrated on active love between individuals and in a community. According to Naylor, "in the writings of Afro-American women, the test of love is what the black woman stays *through*" (29). What these female characters go through together is a show of the great strength, perseverance, and understanding of active love that is needed to be free and grow. The example of this in the novel is Mattie's dream of the Block Party. The wall that blocks Brewster Place from the rest of the city and represents the oppression that these women feel is torn down by all the women. After Lorraine's brutal rape, the last straw,

the women see that the wall is being covered in blood and they do not want it there anymore.

Women flung themselves against the wall, chipping away at it with knives, plastic forks, spiked shoe heels, and even bare hands... the bricks piled up behind them and were snatched and relayed out of Brewster Place... "There's no blood on those bricks!" Kiswana grabbed Ciel by the arm... Ciel pressed the brick into Kiswana's hand forced her fingers to curl around it. "Does it matter? Does it really matter?" (187)

Here we can see, by the literal tearing down of the wall, that because of the love that these women felt for each other and themselves they were able to break with the barriers that were abusing, oppressing and trapping them in the unfortunate circumstances that they were in.

In summary, these novels demonstrate love in a different, fulfilling and liberating way. Active love is more pronounced during the Civil Rights Movement with the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr., but this does not mean that it was used during that period. In the 1930's, Zora Neale Hurston projected it with Janie's relationship with Tea Cake in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Then during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1970's, Toni Morrison reminds us of the consequences of the

absence of this type of love in *Sula*. In the 1980's, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* exhibits the use of active love in a community and there is a resurgence of the exploration of these theories by bell hooks and many others.

With this publication timeline, the reader can observe the development of active love in African American literature written by women. In *Their Eyes*, Janie begins her journey of self-growth and marriage loveless, but, by the conclusion of her story, she has come full circle in her liberation from the oppressions and social constructs of the time. She is able to explore and find her true self because of the trust given by the active love between her and Tea Cake. However, the journey, mistakes, and experiences are also of great importance to the foundation of active love in Janie and in this novel, because it is in this way that Janie and the reader can identify the real active love.

This is also true for the other two texts, however is more of note in *Sula*. This novel shows how two women cease to grow at the age of seventeen or eighteen because of the loss of active love and how these mistakes at the end of their journey help Sula and Nel realize what is important: their love. One could not grow without the active love of the other. Sula dies alone thinking of Nel and Nel after years of solitude and

remorse is able to grow when she finds that it was always Sula who she missed.

A similar thing occurs in *The Women of Brewster Place* with Mattie Michael, when she realizes that the only way to be free and grow is by focusing on her friends and the community that surrounds her and cares for her, even if it means forgetting and forgiving her son, Basil. In *The Women*, this female community decides that things will not improve if they do not work on loving themselves and their community. Similar to the teachings of Martin Luther King, when these women do decide to put differences aside and just love they are liberated from oppression and will grow for themselves and future generations.

It is worthy of note that in all of these novels the characters influenced and benefitted the most are women. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the presence of active love is one of the defining characteristics of African American literature written by these women because of the influence of their historical background on their culture and the Civil Rights Movement. Many women lacked the rights, the support systems and were the scapegoats of oppression by society. As Kathleen Puhr explains,

novels by African-American women depict heroic struggles and gallant role models who have helped their sisters not

only to endure but to prevail. Cut off from support systems in mainstream culture, they have turned to one another. While not an exclusively African-American issue, the practice of women relying on one another for direction and strength crops up with notable regularity in the novels of African-American women. (519)

Hence it should not surprise the reader that the main characters in these novels are female and that they obtain great benefits out of love. Also, in the previous chapter it was discussed that according to Gloria Naylor there is a "double consciousness" of love in African American literature and that it was up to female authors to prove that in fact there was love in the African American community regardless how different it is.

In this literature there is a distinction made between love and black love similar to Alice Walker's womanism and feminism, where black love seems to be more intense and liberating than romantic love. The "double consciousness" of presenting love in a way that can be perceived and approved by whites does not seem to matter, since it is directed to bring comfort to the African American community, especially their women. Scholar Mary Helen Washington in "Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women" explains,

When I think of how essentially alone black women have been-alone because of our bodies, over which we have had so little control; alone because the damage done to our men has prevented their closeness and protection; and alone because we have had no one to tell us stories about ourselves; I realize that black women writers are an important and comforting presence in my life. Only they know my story. It is absolutely necessary that they be permitted to discover and interpret the entire range and spectrum of the experience of black women and not be stymied by preconceived conclusions. Because of these writers, there are more models of how it is possible for us to live, there are more choices for black women to make, and there is a larger space in the universe for us. (qtd. in Spillers)

With this literature and representation of active love readers can relate and can follow the example of these female characters to achieve more liberated lives. These novels were probably not directed only to African Americans, but to women and feminist men in general who can use it for their own liberation and their communities.

Chapter IV: To Love Again: Reviving Love as Empowerment

I still believe that love is the most durable power in the
world.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Love is the only real connective tissue that allows you not to
live and die by yourself. It gives you purpose beyond you.

Will Smith

Love is not a new ideal or an unambiguous topic. It has been around since the beginning of civilization, as we can see by the theories of Plato, but its use as a strategy for liberation from oppression is relatively current. This principle of what I termed as "Active" love had its beginnings with the theories of Dennis de Rougemont and has come full circle with the theories of Martin Luther King, Jr. and bell hooks. This study's objective was to discuss how with the use of love individuals, communities, and even societies can be liberated from oppression and how the act of loving and its benefits are more prevalent in African American literature. Specifically, it was a study of the view of active love in three novels by African American women. This chapter seeks to summarize and

review the conclusions drawn from analyzing the works of Hurston, Morrison, and Naylor and the role of love in their societies. It is expected that the information found in these texts will support my argument of active love as a liberating force that will improve women's lives and serve as a model for real life.

Literature serves as a model for real life and if an individual can relate to the women in these novels and learns the viability of actively loving in order to be free, then these novels have done their duty. As Leslie Fiedler and Mary Helen Washington argue, literature influences real life and it is only when you can relate to it that you are guided. Currently, things are changing and there are conflicting representations of love in literature and popular media. From books and movies that encourage abusive relationships between two or more individuals to actual discourse on love as an action, not a feeling.

As previously discussed, the main discourses on love are occurring in African American literature by women and, in a way, it has been up to them to exhibit love in their writings. Although bell hooks disagrees, men have not written a lot about the act of loving in fiction. However, they do discuss it on non-fiction, reference books. Culturally and historically,

African Americans have a longer tie to the act of loving because of the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement.

It has developed in this culture the most, maybe because of its ties to slavery and the oppression that blacks have suffered through time. As Patricia Hill Collins argues that because of slavery blacks were not able to choose whom to love. In fact, the act of loving was considered unnatural for them by the white majority. In the beginning, the act of loving was considered as setting yourself up for pain and loss. We can see this more pointedly in the literature that deals with the slavery period.

To state an example of this Collins uses a conversation from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The characters are stating that when they were slaves they had to "love small". Collins explains,

When people "protect themselves and love small" by seeing certain groups of people as worthy of love and deeming others less deserving, potential sources of power as energy that can flow from love relationships are attenuated. But when people reject the world as it is constructed by dominant groups, the power as energy that can flow from a range of love relationships becomes possible. (182)

Although she uses *Beloved* for this analysis the reader can deduce that this could apply to other texts, such as the ones

used in this thesis. Furthermore, it can be inferred that any oppressed cultural group could use love as a strategy for freedom.

All of the women in these novels had to reject the dominant ideals about love and the social constructs of their time that were subjugating them in order to experience active love. This active love led to their freedom, their community's freedom, and, ultimately, to their growth as human beings.

Ideally, by reading these novels one can learn and follow their examples to achieve active love. However, it was important to explore the various definitions of love in Chapter One and the historical background of love in Chapter Two, in order to fully understand its purpose and to be able to identify it in the following novels. We turn to books for guidance and understanding; especially of the past. A way to learn and understand active love is to read these three novels, preferably in order of publication thus experiencing the development of the discourse of active love.

In 1937 Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she demonstrates a persistent search for love and a woman's growth as she finds it. Janie in the conclusion of the novel is free from all the social constructs of her time and has begun to preach her knowledge to her community to set them free one by

one. In this novel the view of love as a strategy for liberation is just starting to develop and, like Janie, is probably going to influence the literature to come.

A few years after in the mist of the Civil Rights Movement, *Sula* is published. This novel could serve as a reminder to the African American community of the importance of a love ethic.

As Draga explains,

Morrison dissents from the WASP canon through a rhetoric of absent love that thrives on the weight of what *is not* there, but is, despite that, strongly desired. Love - or its absence - catalyses the shaping of an alternative narrative discourse that, in various ways, reclaims a history for the African American community.. (192)

Even though Draga's study was not referring in particular to the novel *Sula*, we can see that in this novel the absence of love creates a sort of safe haven for Sula and Nel as little girls where they could love and grow together, but when active love ceases to exist both women metaphorically perish. It is only during the Civil Rights Movement, that Nel understands the love ethic needed to progress.

The African American community does progress and is liberated in certain parts of their lives, but there is still work to be done. In 1982 Gloria Naylor gave us *The Women of*

Brewster Place, a novel that demonstrates the next set of chains that restrain the seven women in this novel. They were being oppressed by a wall that isolated them from the rest of the city. It is only when they learn to actively love one another and themselves that they break down barriers and are liberated. As Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. believe "everything moves toward community and the expression of love within the context of community" (Collins 197).

Approximating the women and communities in these novels, I believe like King, Freire, and hooks, that any community can be liberated. Also, at least in the African American community, currently people are starting to acknowledge the importance of love and learning to love actively. As June Jordan elucidates,

As I think about anyone or any thing- whether history or literature or my father or political organizations or a poem or a film- as I seek to evaluate the potentiality, the life supportive commitment/possibilities of anyone or any thing, the decisive question is, always, *where is the love?*
(qtd. in Collins)

We are also seeing this search and understanding of active love in popular media by influential people such as Will Smith. As in the epitaph, to have a "purpose beyond you" is very important in the achievement of active love.

As recently as 2008, America saw a change and it is clear that there is a great number of United States citizens that want to improve. Alice Walker's "Lest We Forget: An open letter to my sisters who are brave" explains obscurely how it does not matter the color of your skin or your gender with the election of Barack Obama we are embracing a love ethic,

If Obama were in any sense mediocre, he would be forgotten by now. He is, in fact, a remarkable human being, not perfect but humanly stunning, like King was and like Mandela is. We look at him, as we looked at them, and are glad to be of our species. He is the change America has been trying desperately and for centuries to hide, ignore, kill. The change America must have if we are to convince the rest of the world that we care about people other than our (white) selves. (Walker)

With the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States, we are seeing a change in the world and especially in the United States. We as a society are moving towards a world that promotes and sees love as a strategy for freedom and equality. One could argue that a contributing factor that guided to this shift was the use of love as a strategy for liberation in African American literature, especially by these female authors.

However, this is just a small contribution in the field of love and African American literature for there are gaps to be filled by others in the search for more knowledge within these fields. My suggestions for further studies are the in-depth analysis of the relationship of male characters and active love in other African American texts. How are loving men represented? Can they achieve love towards the community of men? Also, with the use of the chosen novels, how does the audience respond to these representations of love? What differences in the use of love will be encountered when compared with the film adaptations of these novels? Does active love exist in film? These questions have not been extensively addressed, but if answered there could be significant benefits to our understanding of African American culture.

Exploring love as a strategy for liberation in fiction is a new area of study that holds great promise. Once we learn to consider love an action and not a feeling, once we learn to truly love actively, then can we progress and truly be free of oppression. These novels provide us with a gateway towards discovery and knowledge. The next time we read a book, reminiscent of June Jordan, we must ask ourselves: *where is the love?*

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