

Sweetness By Toni Morrison

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Toni Morrison, Sweetness, and the Literary Examination of Race

The author, Tony Morrison, is a Pulitzer Prize as well as Nobel Prize winner in the American novel category. She was born on 18th February 1931 and is the first African American female Nobel Prize winner in literature. She earned her degree at Howard University and her master's degree at Cornell. She is renowned for writing intricate and compelling literature concerning race during the period between the 20th and the 21st century.

However, Sweetness, which is an excerpt from the author's novel known as *God Help the Child*, was different in the sense that it was a standalone piece fit to be reeled as a short story. This story was published in the *New Yorker* and focuses mainly on the struggles of life as an African American woman. The basis of this story is presenting the hardship these women face in life because of being different from the rest of society. Such hardships are presented in the story as discrimination, eccentric characters, brutal honesty, and set standards of beauty. These factors are used to pull the reader's attention as well as draw their emotions to the story so that they can connect to the story's characters. In this regard, this paper will analyze the theme of racism in Sweetness from the perspective of Tony Morrison.

According to Tony Morrison, racial tension is prevalent in today's society, most especially between African Americans and whites. For a very long time, Africans or people with darker skin color have gone through discrimination because of their skin color. Thus, Morrison uses a narrative of a mother and her daughter to present the prevalence of racism in society, which presents itself in not-so-obvious ways. The depth of racism in society is perfectly presented using this mother known as Sweetness, who is very ashamed that she gave birth to a child whose skin is darker than her and the rest of the society. Generally, Morris asserts that the everyday interaction of the people in the society is coupled with racism. Yet, people are not willing to confess and do away with inequalities in society through examination and elimination of the subtle manner in which people treat one another in a different way. For instance, Sweet states, "It's not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't do it and have no idea how it happened" (Morrison, 2015). Therefore, it involved a deliberate and unrelenting voice to deal with racism in society.

Colourism, Motherhood, and the Association of Darkness with Evil

Morrison treats racism in light of skin color and implies that darker skin is associated with bad things or evil. The woman, Sweetness, is an African American, but when she gives birth to a darker-skinned girl, she feels that something is not right, and she thinks something is really wrong with the baby. She feels embarrassed, and she desires to cover the baby with the blanket so that people don't see. Moreover, she refers to her child as pickaninny a not so good term but very offensive. She also finds that her daughter's eyes are "witchy." Consequently, she tells the daughter to refer to her as Sweetness but not as 'Mama.' This is a sign of distancing herself from an individual who has a different skin color from hers.

In addition, the skin color of Sweetness' daughter, Lula Ann, was the reason behind the destruction of her parents' marriage. The back and forth concerning the originality of the child's dark skin causes her husband to suggest that the wife must have gotten the baby out of infidelity. On the other hand, the mother suggested that the dark-skinned child could be coming from his family genes. As a result, Lula Ann's Father left their home and his family. According to the writer, the members of the Sweetness family tend to be born pale, and they pass as whites. Therefore, most of them would cut ties with their family members to fit in the white category in society because the lighter the skin color, the better for them.

The skin privilege is what keeps Sweet and her family members from identifying with lighter-skinned people than the darker people. This privilege is not likely to be enjoyed by Luna Ann as she is darker than the rest of the family and society. The skin darkness is likely to attract indignities such as being elbowed or spit on, restricted from using department stores' restrooms, and trying on hats. Moreover, being black causes one to be restricted to drinking on the water fountain for colored people only. They would probably be charged more for a paper bag in a grocery store, which costs nothing for a white person.

Racial Injustice, Complicity, and the Moral Failure of Acceptance

By accepting the injustice perpetrated through racism, 'sweetness' is in the wrong. Any injustice in society should not be condoned, but people should try to change it. Thus, Sweetness deserves to be blamed for accepting and not attempting to change the vice in society. When Lula Ann grows into a beautiful adult, she utilizes her skin color "to her advantage in beautiful white clothes" (Morrison, 2015) to advance her career success. Sweetness never expected the world to change and make it possible for blacks to be "all over TV, in fashion magazines, commercials, even starring in movies" (Morrison, 2015). Despite having some regrets, she does not own up and states, "I know I did the best

for her under the circumstances” (Morrison, 2015).

Therefore, Morrison wanted to highlight the underlying racial tension which is still prevalent in today’s society. He talks about racism in regards to the skin color of the people. He presents darker skin as associated with evil and bad things, while lighter skin is associated with privileges in society. For instance, he portrays Lula, the child with darker skin than both her parents, as the reason behind the destruction of her parents’ marriage. Moreover, lighter skin gives privileges to some members of society, while darker skin attracts indignities. Therefore, Sweetness and her family prefer to associate lighter skin with darker skin. However, injustice in society should not be accepted; it should be dealt with immediately by changing it.

References

Morrison, T. (2015, February 9). Sweetness. Retrieved from The New Yorker.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/sweetness-2>