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## Nel Wright's Individuation Process In Toni Morrison's *Sula*

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### ABSTRACT

*Human's life is guided by some primordial images called archetypes which have been inherited from the ancestors. One of the archetypes is the self. It motivates human to reach unity which becomes the goal of life. Self is only found when an individual has gained individuation process. It is the process in which an individual learns about himself and accept his weaknesses and his strength. During the process, one may struggle to decide between good or evil, right or wrong, and what to show or hide. The most difficult thing is to acknowledge our shadow and accept it as part of our self. This research is to reveal Nel Wright's experience in integrating the conflicting aspects of her personality within individuation process. Thus, the data are collected through library research. The main data of the thesis is Toni Morrison's novel, *Sula*. The first step to analyze Nel Wright's individuation process and it must be done by analyzing the intrinsic elements of the novel particularly the setting, the character and characterization. The analysis of the archetypes and their roles within the individuation process will be done based on the theory of Jungian Analytical Psychology.*

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### Introduction

Toni Morrison, though far from Harlem, motivated and inspired by the life of African slaves as her root ancestor, is one of the greatest authors in America. She writes as black woman with the audiences of black women in mind. She brings up all issues about black people, without protesting or complaining about them.

WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) dominance in all social domains allows them to set societal standards. They establish role models of ideal families, perfect behavior, ideal beauty, and so on. African-Americans, as a subordinate community, have little choice but to adhere to the standards in order to exist in society. Social standards can contradict their own ideals, culture, and

way of life. As a result, in order to meet the norms, people are driven to abandon their own values, culture, and even their true selves.

This predicament forces them to choose between denying their own ideals in order to be accepted by society and accepting their own values in order to be expelled from society. Whatever decisions they make, they must accept the most unpleasant outcome. Many of Toni Morrison's writings address this subject. Her first work, *The Bluest Eye*, depicts two female characters who make opposing decisions. Pecola Breedlove makes the conscious decision to distance herself from her own values and personality. Her actions, however, culminate in failure. She goes nuts as a result of her unachievable desire to have the bluest eye. Claudia, on the other hand, is able to keep her principles despite the fact that she does not meet the beauty ideal.

Moreover in her second novel, *Sula*, she portrays a black community who struggles to follow the social standards that do not belong to them. The issue brought up in the previous novel, gives more devastating effect on African-Americans, especially the women. The people in the Bottom who conform to the social standard live a lie by creating perfect masks. They deny their dark pasts and hide their lies.

Helene Wright is raised by her grand mother in a great fear of becoming like her prostitute mother. When she finally succeeds to live as a good mother and wife, she forces her daughter to forget her mother too.

*“What does ‘vwah’ mean?”*

*“I don’t know,” her mother said. “I don’t talk Creole.” She gazed at her daughter’s wet buttocks. “And neither do you.” (Morrison: 27)*

Nel learns to make persona from her mother’s effort to hide her *black skin* on the journey to south. Helene counts on a nice gown and good manner to protect her from race discrimination during the dangerous journey. However, that kind of protection is not working a hundred percent. Nel watched when her mother cutting the pattern from newspapers and moving her eyes rapidly from a magazine model to her own hands. (Morrison:19).

She still receives abuse from a white man and insulting stare from the soldiers. Nel worries if somehow her mother’s black skin would be revealed. However, she is more concerned if she finds possibility that she could be black too.

*In the silence that preceded the train’s heave, she looked deeply at the folds of her mother’s dress. There in the fall of the heavy brown wool she held her eyes. She could not risk letting them travel upward for fear of seeing that the hooks and eyes in the placket of the dress had come undone and exposed the custard-colored skin*

*underneath. She stared at the hem, wanting to believe in its weight but knowing that custard was all it hid. If this tall proud, woman, this woman who was very particular about her friends, who slipped into church with unequaled elegance, who could quell a roustabout with a look, if she were really custard, then there was a chance that Nel was too. (Morrison:22)*

That experience motivates her to make persona. She promises to herself not to be abused or intimidated by anyone and by any reasons. She chooses to conform to the white values and forgetting herself as black person. Her goal is to leave Medallion, the town where black people live miserably, the land which marks Black slave's stupidity.

In *Sula*, Morrison gives another option to react against the social standards created by white people. Sula Peace denies the stereotype of nurturing mother and chooses to live the way she likes. Her rejection toward the value and the people of the Bottom leaves her in lonesome. No one even sits beside her in her deathbed.

Sula's character serves as shadow. The kind of personality or behavior people would hate. However, people are jealous to her. Deep down in their hearts they want to be her. Nel cannot even hate her though she is having affair with her husband. The shadow is reflected through Sula's appearance. The most obvious sign is her black birthmark on her face. It is somehow like a stemmed rose or a serpent. The rose mark over Sula's eye gave her glance a suggestion of startled pleasure. It was darker than Nel remembered. (Morrison:96).

Inspired by Trudier Harris' book entitled *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1993), this research is proposed on analyzing the archetypes found in the novel. He reveals that *Sula* is structured in African-American folk tradition. According to Harries *Sula* is structured following three kinds of pattern. They are classic European fairy tales opening, pattern of joking in African-American communities, and the form of ballad which in turn reminds us of jazz composition.

Further more in his book, he states that the characters and setting in *Sula* seem very strong and real that the novel can be considered as realism. However, they seem too fantastic and mystical to be real. Toni Morrison removes that grounding in a known place and locates her characters in a territory that invites the fantastic and the mythical as easily as realistic (Harries:1993:53). However, Harries only focused on the structure of the novel. He did not consider the theme of the novel important in his analysis. Therefore, this research will be expanded on analyzing the theme

of the novel, which is to reveal the character's individuation process directed by the archetypes. Since the aim of this thesis is to analyze the archetypes, it is therefore appropriate to use archetypal or Jungian criticism.

Jung spent much time of his life to explore the processes by which a person becomes a complete individual. He investigates a process of differentiation by which individual develop their unique patterns of traits and their idiosyncratic relationship to each one's personal and collective unconscious. Jung called such process individuation.

Although *Sula* can be seen as social critics against the social standards in America, it will be challenging to analyze the character's journey to gain individuation process. *Sula* was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 and made Toni Morrison the first black woman to receive the award. This fact challenges the writer to explore the richness of the novel and the profound thought of Toni Morrison about the essence of being a *black woman*.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories of selfhood and identification are currently prevalent among literary critics. Before discussing the work and its characters, the following paragraphs will briefly explore some prominent thinkers and their conceptions of identity.

According to Jung, our persona (identity) is a socially produced idea that is influenced by social institutions such as family and school. Although he believes in the collective consciousness, he does not reject the role of these institutions in the individuation process. He says that the collective unconscious exists beneath our personal unconscious and is passed on to all people as a shared memory.

*I have chosen the term "collective" because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals (1959, p.30).*

He refers to identification as "ego" and argues that our memories, understandings, and mental and bodily states are all part of our personal unconscious, which is directly tied to our self-image. Jung argues that our self-realization and oneness are the result of a long process influenced greatly by the events and experiences that surround us. He, like his tutor, believes that we are all filled with unmet wants and instincts that have been suppressed by civilization.

*The sight of a child...will arouse certain longings in adult, civilized persons longings which relate to the unfulfilled desires and needs of those parts of the personality which have been blotted out of the total picture in favor of the adapted persona (1959, p.39).*

Jung is another psychologist who emphasizes the concept of identity, particularly in youngsters. In his work *Introduction to Child Development*, he examines eight phases of psychosocial development and shows how how people are regarded by others influences their identity creation. He believes that if our identity is molded powerfully in a tranquil environment from a young age, we will have a confident personality in adulthood.

The stage at when the individual begins to question his own existence and asks, "Who am I?" The "What Can I Be?" stage, also known as the Fidelity stage, is when identity is formed. Erikson regards this period as the most crucial in a person's psychosocial development. Erikson refers to the issues and confrontations that people face in their lives as "identity crises," and describes how we can effectively build a strong identity by navigating these crises with the support of our parents, teachers, and friends (Ibid, p.23). According to him, successful social interactions and emotional intimacy with other members of society can aid in the development of social skills and the fulfillment of social relationships. We react to life's difficulties and circumstances much differently than anyone else.

### **Method of Analyzing the data**

The main data will be analyzed in two ways. The first way is analyzing the intrinsic elements of the novel to find the archetypes. The intrinsic elements include character and characterization and setting. The intrinsic study is done to give more understanding about the novel before we analyze the major issue.

The conclusion of intrinsic study then will become the main source to analyze the extrinsic element. There are two types of setting described in the novel, nature and manufacture. Nel Wright is the main character analyzed in the thesis. However, other characters are included to support the analysis. In defining the setting and character and characterization, this thesis depends on the definitions proposed by Laurence. The further analysis will focus on revealing Nel Wright's strategy to gain individuation process.

## **Discussion**

Toni Morrison narrated "Nel is the story of a girl who is a rebel against all society, all conventions, and nearly all moralities". as a novel illustrating the process of identity development in the life of its main character. Even on her deathbed, she appears to be proud of her rebellious and free life.

*-Sula: You think I don't know what your life is like just because I ain't living it? I know what every colored woman in this country is doing.*

*- Nel: What's that?*

*-Sula: Dying. Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world (p. 193).*

Nel's identity is shaped, changed, and affected by her social and cultural setting in a black community through her rebellions: "Sula disregards the social norms and quests desperately for freedom and a united self out of a chaos around her" (p. 68). Despite her moniker, "Nel Peace," she is unable to find closure in her individuation. As we see at the end of the novel, Nel confesses on her deathbed that she had not found the true essence of love in her life. According to Henry Tajfel's perspective, Nel lacks a healthy and acceptable social identity in her society: "A demon in the eyes of her community, Nel is a kind of Lilith, taking sexual satisfaction wherever she will" (Bloom, 1999, p. 51) as Morrison clarifies.

In some ways, her oddity, naiveté, and desire for the other half of her equation were the result of idle imagination. She might have traded her restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she desired if she had painted, or worked with clay, or learned the discipline of dancing, or played the strings. And, like every artist who lacks a medium, she became dangerous.

The establishment of Nel's identity is complemented by her self-creation through independence from her family and society. Her rejection of social conventions and ideals demonstrates her desire to live freely as a self-sufficient girl. In the face of obstacles such as violence, racial prejudice, misogyny, and poverty, Sula uses her hands to cope with life's difficulties and shape her own identity. She abandons Medallion in quest of "herself." She moves from city to city for 10 years, shaping and reshaping her identity to the point of a significant shift in her appearance and conduct when she returns. Nel is the main character that represents a rebellious female character in a black culture.

Nel faces caustic comments from her community members during her individuation process, condemning her for awkward and unusual habits. Even within her own family, she is not well-liked and does not have a favorable physical and psychological self-image. Nel's birthmark, combined with her rebellious actions, result in her low-schema and isolation from society. This estrangement and loneliness has an impact on her identity formation as a youngster, resulting in a tight connection between her and Sula. According to Morrison, "they are solitary little girls whose loneliness was so profound that it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into techno-colored visions that always included a presence, a someone, who, quiet like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream" (p.63). Despite their disparities in cultural and social origins, they remain excellent friends.

Nel feels unloved by her family after overhearing her mother remark she does not love her daughter. As a result, she had an unusual childhood with little care, attention, or support. Individuals are profoundly influenced by how others treat them, according to Henry Tajfel. Because of her physical and behavioral peculiarities, Nel is abandoned by her community (Tajfel, 1984, p.20). The harsh responses she receives from members of this community fracture her social identity. Sula's irritation and worry are exacerbated by the absence of important ideas such as love, belonging, and attachment in her life, forcing her to flee town in quest of a new existence.

Her identity formation takes place in perilous circumstances in which she is deprived of parental care and attention, leading to rebelliousness and disdain for social standards. This issue of familial relationships and their influence on an individual's personality may also be noticed in the novel's other characters. Sula, Nel's friend, is a true family member, loving her mother's care and attention, which makes her feel whole. However, after a terrifying train ride, Nel discovers her plight as a black girl:

*It was on that train, shuffling toward Cincinnati, that she resolved to be on guard—always. She wanted to make certain that no man ever looked at her that way. That no midnight eyes or marbled flesh would ever accost her and turn her into jelly (p.35).*

But things go the other way around too. After this incident, Nel tries her best to be different from her mother and starts to shape her own identity:

*Each time she said the word me there was a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear. Back in bed with her discovery, she stared out the window at the dark leaves of the horse chestnut. 'Me,' she murmured. And then, sinking deeper into the quilts, 'I want... I want to be... wonderful. Oh, Jesus, make me wonderful(p.26).*

Nel's pure, mature, and attached life is full of respect, dignity, and obedience. She believes that these things will complete her family's identity building process as a woman. She, like Sula, decides to shape her personality and take charge of her life. Other characters, in addition to Sula and Nel, are going through individuation and "searching for themselves in an alien world- white and male." Bloom (1999), p.32. Hannah, Eva, and Shadrock are among those who are victims of a hostile white-dominated society, attempting to survive and rebuild their shattered lives.

Eva, Nel's grandmother, had a different life experience as a result of her husband's abandonment, raising her three children with the little money she obtained from her missing leg insurance. She is a strong woman who is one of the black ladies who accept their skin color and attempt to cope with the mental and physical issues they confront in a racist culture. Eva demonstrates that she can deal with and manage life's disasters by putting herself through difficult situations. As we can see, she can build a boarding home and house a large number of boarders and family members.

Eva has developed a strong personal and social identity as a result of years of struggle and loneliness. Furthermore, there are clear indications of Eva's influence on Nel's identity construction. Her free character (disregarding social standards and conventions) influences Sula's behavior in various circumstances, allowing Nel to have fun and break the rules. Sula, like her grandmother, goes through life stages and struggles with her identity as a Black woman. But the most essential aspect of Eva's journey is her unhappy ending in a nursing home at the end of the novel:

*Her once beautiful leg had no stocking and the foot was in a slipper. Nel wanted to cry—not for Eva's milk-dull eyes or her floppy lips, but for the once proud foot accustomed for over a half century to a fine well-laced shoe, now stuffed gracelessly into a pink terrycloth slipper (p.199).*

Sula, in various ways, deals with the issue of identity and its construction in repressive psychological situations. This work delves deeply into the question of women and its creation in black cultures. The story's various protagonists struggle with life's issues and experiences along the route they have chosen for themselves. For example, Shadrack, a black WWI survivor, has chosen to live his life as a powerful man in charge of his circumstances. He does not allow suppressive forces to govern his life and instead directs his own destiny. Even death cannot hold him back:



It was the unexpectedness of both death and dying that terrified him. He came up with the idea that if one day a year was devoted to it, everyone could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free. In this way, he established National Suicide Prevention Day. (p.12). But this character, like the other Black characters in the novel, cannot leave from the sorrows of the skin color:

*He fought a rising hysteria that was not merely anxiety to free his aching feet; his very life depended on the release of the knots. Suddenly without raising his eyelids, he began to cry (p.15).*

## **Conclusion**

Regarding to the analysis presented in the previous chapter, it is concluded that the novel contains nine archetypal which is found in characters and symbols. Thus, the novel tells an individuation process conducted by a character, Nel. At first Nel as the one of female character has not been completed since it is impossible to compensate between consciousness and unconsciousness. Inherited Nel's fear, she uses persona to conform with society standard. The shadow rises as the consequence of race discrimination toward the character. The society belongs to normal people and establishes rules that commonly. Therefore, the character is unable conform with the society which becomes the main requirement to pass the stage four.

Nel is able to pass almost all of the stages, as the result of her acknowledgement with the representative of the wise old man inspires her, that there might be some possibilities of the society that will receive their existence as minor citizen. Although it took a long time, in the early 1990, American society began to aware the existence of black woman. In the end of her life Nel thinks that as a part of minority classes she had to expose his existences. She should breaks society standard that becomes different it did not means that they are not allows to life.

The last is in our society there are many racism. As an anti- racist novel, Sula explores the life of black characters who go through their process of identity formation in hard suppressive social contexts. As outlined in this paper, different characters in the novel are highly affected by this context and also by the events in their life due to their skin color. Their social and personal identity is formed in this atmosphere, leading them to a miserable destiny. Their race, as a stigma, is the main root for their low self- esteem and shattered self-schema. Their identities are shaped and reshaped under tough conditions in which they suffer discrimination and cruelty, as Franz Fanon depicts: "For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white." But we should think

that in order for our human species to be able to continue to evolve, we have to be able to accept all people, including minorities people. If they have to live with a unacceptable self and being eliminated or hiding their identities in order to be accepted, they will lose their existence, erase their freedom although they are actually normal people.

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