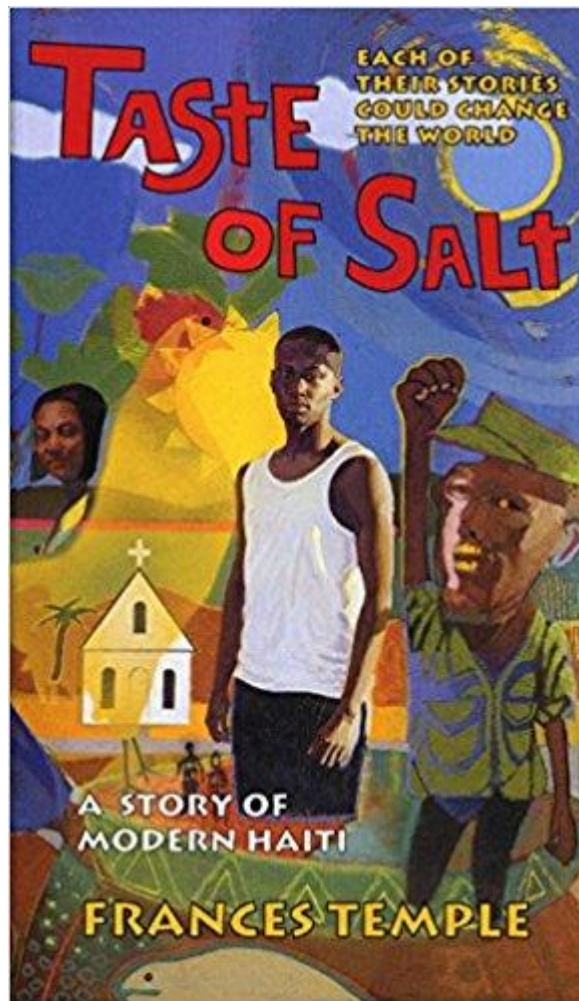


Disintegration of Human Bonds in Martha Southgate's  
*The Taste Of Salt*

P. Amala, M.Phil. Scholar

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Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Taste-Salt-Story-Modern-Haiti/dp/0064471365>

**Abstract**

The present paper focuses on Martha Southgate's *The Taste of Salt*. It is a story of an endless power of addiction and the harm it does not only to the addict but also to the others

surrounded to them. This paper also throws light on the “Disintegration of Human Bondage”. It deals with the addiction and its problem which leads to the shattered relationships in the family. The emotional distant among the members in the family is due to their lack of intimacy, escaping from their past and afraid to deal with the problems. This paper is intended to analyse the novel *The Taste of Salt* in the perception of African Americans struggle to prove their identity both in personal and professional life.

## Introduction

African American literature focuses on the literary writings of the African people who were settled in America. In America particularly in south, there were several laws that made African Americans to be placed in low position. In addition, there were many organisations that were violence against them. These social and historical events pushed many African Americans to be poets and writers. Because writing is the only way to express themselves. Their journey exists from the colonial period to till the present. They want to get social justice and freedom.

## Issues of the Period

Before understanding the origin of African American literature, it is important to know the main issues of that period. The issues of Race and suppression of colour pushed African Americans to use writing as a weapon to social change. They have developed the ideas of inferiority and distinction through their bitter experience and preconceptions rooted in images of blackness and physical differences between the two people. Those negative images were created by English adventures and traders who visited the African continent. The literature of England presented a pessimistic portrayal of Africans and their ways of life. The Africans were considered as brutal and ugly people.

## Racism

The issue of racism made Africans-American to be unrecognized and their works unauthenticated such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Through sermons, poetry, letters and slave narratives, African American literature of the colonial period was a means of breaking the bonds of slavery. In New England, those slaves who were with their master’s family exchanged their stories and experiences with the audience. They described their lives before slavery in Africa and their daily activities. They portrayed the sufferings felt by husbands and wives separated from each other as well as separations of brothers from sisters and children from parents.

## Martha Southgate

Martha Southgate (born on December 12, 1960) is an African American novelist. Southgate was born in Cleveland, Ohio. Her works are *Another way to Dance* (1997). *The Fall of Rome: A Novel* (2002). *Third Girl from the Left* (2005). *The Taste of salt* (2011). The story *The Taste of Salt* is about the young African American marine biologist Josie Henderson. She belongs to the hardworking middle-class family. Her father, Ray is an auto worker and her mother Sarah is a nurse. Her brother Tick is a vagabond who roams aimlessly. The story also deals with the marriage life of Ray and Sarah. And it speaks about the marriage of Josie with white fellow scientist Daniel and her relationship as lover with her co worker Ben Davidson. The entire novel

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picturise the problem in life of these characters due to the addiction of alcoholism and which results in the broken relationship.

### **Concept of Self**

Society is made up of individuals, who depend upon each other. It is necessary for the individual to rely upon others either for the material wealth or for the mental health. For example, an individual is dependent on family, family is dependent on society and the dependency further goes on. In the contemporary society, people do not understand the importance of kith and kin and they go out of the relationship bondage. According to the *Oxford Compact Dictionary*, the word “disintegrate” means “break up”. People break up their up their relationship for their own wish and desires to be fulfilled. So, this gives rise to the concept of self. When people concentrate on self they become helpless in problematic situation. “In the dissertation *self in select novels of Iris Murdoch and Saul Bellow* it is Stated that “When the individual holds himself from his self, the more pathetic becomes his sense of existence.” (Visaka devi(27) This concept makes people to concentrate on them alone rather than family, society and so on. Similarly, these characters in this novel *The Taste of Salt* moves away from their own family for various reasons.

In most of the cases the happiness of one’s life is determined by the members in the family. Family remains as a motivating force in individual’s life for their success. But sometimes the family life is not bed of roses for all. It becomes thorns because of their individuality. The difference in individual due to generation gap, worldly pleasure, importance of material world, professional importance makes them to be away from their family.

### **Life of Josie and Her Family**

Martha Southgate’s *The Taste of Salt* presents the life of Josie and her family which is scattered by alcoholism. The novel describes the struggles and sufferings faced by the members of black family in contemporary American society to achieve their aspiration. Ray and Sarah both are from two different worlds. Ray, the father is a self-made uneducated man who works in automobile company. Whereas Sarah is an educated nurse who is also the daughter of doctor. He fell in love with Sarah. Their love extended till the marriage and the birth of Josie. But the love began to decrease as the year passes by. Until the birth of Tick, they shared their love and led a happy life. But after the birth of Tick their conflicts began. In the earlier days Ray helped her in all the things but later he skipped it by concentrating on his work. There are more changes in his attitude. Though he does his responsibilities, she could not feel happy and enjoy the life as she experiences it before. They lost understanding and distance between them does not allow him to lead the happy life which they once experienced.

“They used to do chores together and having a good time doing them. He’d do the dishes while she swept or something like that, and they’d joke around. But somehow he had just stopped helping with all that. She didn’t have the nerve to ask him about it.” (55)

### **Expectation of Respect and Recognition in Profession**

Josie's expectation of respect and recognition in profession made her to distant herself emotionally, physically and mentally from her family. She also moves away by denying the connection of family. Her father gradually addicted to alcohol. So, in order to avoid her miserable family life, she immersed herself in books. This habit of reading books as a kind of escapism helped her to pursue her career as marine biologist. The black female biologists are very rare. So, both her love for water and reading habit made her as scientist particularly as a marine biologist.

Josie and her constructed life as a marine biologist made her to go apart from the family. Josie married a white man named Daniel. She is utterly free from her family bondage and she is completely detached from her family. Daniel is a loving husband who wants children. Their experience in family life has got plenty of differences. The racial difference could be seen when Josie introduces her husband, she herself describes that he is white. She tells that "People don't disapprove but they do notice...because I notice it myself." (9) So the racial inferiority in the biracial couple makes the relationship broken.

### **Daniel**

Even in the description of character there are lot of differences in them. "Any way Daniel he is kind, Precise and quiet. I was drawn to those things about him. I try to be precise, but it doesn't come naturally..." Their difference in their ideas like he wants to have the offspring of his own, but she does not want to possess. She herself knows that she is running out of time as she thirty-six years old. She also thinks that her femininity is not judged by the offspring. "I'm not entirely sure that I want to have kids. Wait. The truth. The truth is, I know I don't want to. Daniel wants them. I don't." (12) She married him as he understood her love for her marine life, but she is afraid to trust him with her family conflicts because she thinks that he does not be used with black. So this makes her even to throw her love for her husband and become close with another black scientist Ben. She is ready to throw away the feelings for her family and wants to experience a life which is free from racial trouble and unhappy family.

### **Family Life**

Some people concentrate on their professional life more than their family life. But women need to concentrate on both family and profession. If not the happiness of the family will be lost. Similarly, Josie too gives much importance for her profession though she loves her husband. For certain period of time Josie and Daniel lead their life peacefully after their marriage. One day when she came home late he questions her for the delay. So Josie tells that "I love you but I gotta do my work. You know that." (128) But he tells that he is ready to schedule his time for the happy and peace of their family.

### **Roy and Sarah**

Ray's habit of alcoholism destroyed his marriage life with Sarah. He is sent out of family by her mother when Josie is seventeen. Though he remains sober for many years Josie has never forgiven him. Her father's addiction to alcoholism breaks the family apart. Her brother Tick is also addicted to alcohol and drug. He got addicted to alcohol which is the root cause of his

emotional detachment from her mother. “I went to Tick’s apartment the other day. The landlord let me in. He knows there’s a problem. Josie, it was so filthy—bottles everywhere. I can’t... an animal wouldn’t live the way your brother lives. Its breaking your father’s heart.” (22-23) This is also the reason for her to turn away from the family. Josie and her brother Tick are bonded at their younger age but later due to his addiction she purposefully refuses him. She avoids both her father and her brother. In this way she disintegrates herself from the members in the family.

### **Breaking Bondage**

Not only the major characters broke their bondage but even the minor characters. Ben break up with his lady love for no reasons. “He talked about Leslie, What might have gone wrong...” (153) People does not express their inconvenience with the beloved ones. One side people think on their own perspective of being hurt. On the other side people didn’t even know the cause of the problem. Josie moved very close with Ben and even decides to leave Daniel for the sake of him. But Ben does not accept her idea of making their relationship permanent. She decided to make it so because of her trust and sense of belonging towards him. But Ben puts an end to it though Josie does not want to.

### **Caught between Dual Identities**

African Americans are caught between the dual identities. They are unable to follow either their black stereotype or fit in white practices. Josie also caught between the dilemma of professional upper middle-class life and lower middle class struggles of her family. She struggles to live in highly respectful life and also, she needs the company of black people. Later Josie totally wanted to separate from her background which includes both her city and family.

There are still people who long for their own sense of belonging. People do not feel that they belong to social system called family. This lack of belongingness may be due to separation from the family, feeling of inferiority among the family members. Whenever people do some mistakes in life, either they are rejected or condemned by their family members. People do not understand the fact that relationship is more important than perfectness and professional success. In the present era, people give importance only to their professional and their comforts; they fail to recognise themselves as a part of their family. There is only one solution to this problem that people should throw away their selfishness and should care about their family members too.

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