

# Literary Analysis of Sula (Toni Morrison)

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Received Date: 01 September 2023

Revised Date: 15 September 2023

Accepted Date: 20 September 2023

**Abstract:** Toni Morrison, a prominent African-American novelist, was born in Lorain, Ohio on February 18, 1931. Throughout her career, she has extensively explored themes of race and gender in her writing. The recipient of the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature was the first African-American writer to achieve this honor. This paper explores the portrayal of a modern woman through the character of Sula in Morrison's work. Morrison's female protagonists exhibit greater strength compared to others. The novels she writes vividly portray the dual sense of alienation experienced by black women. Throughout history, across various cultures and nations, women's lives have been shaped and controlled by patriarchal systems. These systems have imposed certain values, roles, perceptions of gender, and ideals that promote unequal opportunities and methods for women to attain a perceived state of completeness. The historical narrative tends to prioritize the experiences and perspectives of men over those of women. When women attempt to define themselves in contrast to the prevailing culture, they are often criticized as reactionary forces seeking to disrupt societal stability. Morrison's portrayal of women rebelling against societal norms explores the consequences they face, highlighting their sense of isolation. Morrison recognized the importance of accurately recounting women's experiences to prevent misinterpretation by others. Morrison's alienated characters embody the potential for women to start anew.

**Keywords:** Individual identity, racism, self-actualization, sexism, and female rebellion.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Men and women are obviously different. Women face discrimination and a higher bar to success in a society dominated by males. Women are typically socially conditioned to be housewives and mothers, limiting their career options severely restricted. A woman's worth is evaluated based on factors that have nothing to do with her actual ability. Because they must contend with racism and discrimination, women of color find themselves torn between two political allegiances. The ways in which sexism and racism have played out in their lives, in particular, make their experiences distinctive. A white, attractive lady is the American ideal for men to strive after. To add insult to injury, black women do not resemble the stereotypical American woman. It's hardly unexpected that black women writers in Black female literature focus on the intersection of sex and race, whether they do it on purpose or not. Women of color in black literature of the 1970s are shown as they progressed from stereotypical characters to independent protagonists. There are two stages in her maturation: the disappearance of the artificially-imposed negative self and the birth of a hybrid new self. Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Gayle Jones, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, and many other women novelists chronicle the black female experience from childhood to womanhood in the 1970s. The women in Morrison's works have to find their own examples of strong, independent women whose success isn't predicated on their relationships with males. By doing so, she hopes to liberate black women from the tired stereotype of passive victims of white and black chauvinism. Even though Morrison's female characters experience racism and sexism, they are able to see their own potential because they have become whole people. Morrison learns about women's power as creators from her mother and grandmother. Throughout her upbringing, she was mentored by both her grandmother and her mother, who showed her the power of women as creators. The women in Morrison's books are resilient and tough. Instead of depicting women's inner growth as they seek happiness, female authors tend to stereotype them. In contrast, Morrison's heroines reveal not a stereotype but a mental state. Her female protagonists always fight to find themselves in hostile environments. Morrison stresses the importance of realizing one's potential, which he says is the path to self-respect.

## II. SULA BY RUTH YEAZELL

The protagonist of *SULA* (1973), Morrison's second novel, is a woman out for herself. Morrison's National Book Critics Circle Award-winning novel *SULA* has a strong female protagonist whose journey toward self-discovery mirrors that of today's women. Sula has not yet reached the point where she can conform to societal norms. She has no desire to be anyone's maker or mother. Historically, males have regarded women through the lens of mother, wife, mistress, and sex object. However, Sula is a woman who consciously deviates from a socially acceptable archetype by taking on a new position



and creating a new way of life, for which she pays a high price in the form of shame, isolation, or madness. Sula is a “self-actualizing, strong, risk-taking, independent but also capable of loving and being loved” (Ruth Yeazell 29-38).

In *SULA*, set in a fictional Midwestern town named Bottom, we follow the lives of Sula, an independent woman who is viewed as a threat by the other residents, and her dear companion Nel from their early years until their deaths. Sula and Nel couldn't be more opposite in temperament. Nel is reserved and humble, whereas Sula is loud and brash. Nel was the missing piece to Sula's puzzle, and together they completed each other. They fulfilled each other's needs for love and safety that weren't met at home. When her daughters reach maturity, Nel Wright follows the social norms of the Bottom and settles down to have a family. And Sula Peace chooses to leave Bottom to pursue an education, forging a new path toward individual fulfillment. Sula transcends the binary of black and white, male and female, and life and death, whereas Nel succumbs to racism and sexism after giving in to Bottom life. She's basically living a fantasy life. Her journey of self-discovery ultimately takes her along the road to fulfillment.

Sula leaves Bottom not long after Nel's wedding and does not return for a span of 10 years. She is involved in several affairs, including some with white males. However, she discovers that people in other places are following the same dull routines, which prompts her to return to Bottom and Nel. When she gets back, she decides that she is not going to keep the family home in the same way as her mother and grandmother had done before her. Sula's growth is heavily influenced by two different events that take place throughout the book. The first one is a discussion that she overhears, in which her mother Hannah is overheard expressing that she loves Sula. I really don't care for her, and the fact that she unintentionally had a role in the death of one of her classmates, a young girl named Chicken Little, makes me dislike her even more.

“The first experience taught her that there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow...She completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments- no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself- be consistent with herself” (SULA 119).

Sula is a social outcast because she has ideals that are diametrically opposed to those of her little town. Sula makes up her own rules for her life and chooses her own goals. From her answer to the question, it is clear that she is driven by a strong feeling of self-importance. marriage. She doesn't see herself ever getting married. Her feeling of self-worth stems from more than just being a wife and mother. Morrison utilizes Sula to raise doubts about the common practice of taking one's own existence at its value. Sula is a role model for the black community because she rejects the culture's notion of who she is, which tends to be derogatory. She rejects the group and raises doubts about marriage, a norm that helps justify women's subservience in society.

### III. SULA - A NOVEL REVIEW

Sula is unable to deny or conquer her sexuality. Instead, she gives it a sly, subversive twist. In her quest for individuality, she decides to cut ties with her peers. Sula rejects not just whiteness but also blackness and the social and cultural standards that define black women, unlike Nel and the other characters. Critics of Africanism, who believe that Africa is an "invented" concept, can't seem to get past the way Sula is portrayed in the media. For the sake of establishing various myths and stereotypes, western authors rendered this made-up Africa powerless or defined it in ways that suited their purposes. Sula proves that it is necessary to get beyond the confines of the binary opposition between Africanism and feminism. Sula's radicalism stems from her upbringing and is visible even at a young age. On her walk home from school, Sula is harassed by a group of guys. In response, she pulls out a knife and cuts the tip of her finger, telling them, "If I do that to myself, what do you think I'll do to you?" (SULA143).

Sula possesses an extra-dimensionality that allows for the development of art and ideas. She defies categorization as either the oppressor or the oppressed, the masculine or the female, the black or the white. She can be anyone she wants to be; it's her life and her decisions. Also, the contents. So, to put it another way: I got me. Sula opts to be an outsider, to identify herself in opposition to the group. When she insists that she lives mainly as and for herself, rather than to be a mother or to the cherished of men, Sula overturns the notion of virtue and evil in respect to women, making her the most radical character in fiction from the 1970s.

She lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions giving them full reign feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, her's was an experimental life (SULA 118).

#### IV. SULA'S DEATH

Morality and duty are discussed during Nel's visit with the terminally sick Sula. Sula disputes Nel's claim that black women cannot make it financially on their own. She says that all the women she knows are perishing. Nel holds Sula solely responsible for the breakdown of her relationship with Jude. Sula does not dispute that she slept with Jude, but she does not take full blame for his decision to abandon Nel. The morally motivated inquiry may arise as a result of Sula's sex with Jude. Where could she do that to her closest companion? It's the incorrect question since it presumes Sula doesn't trade in a moral universe. When considering her past, Sula feels no remorse. She thinks most of what passes for feeling in today's society is only a distraction. People give their emotions and deeds extra weight by imbuing them with moral importance. She can't believe Nel sees her just through the lens of her affair with Jude, and she feels bad that the affair has taken precedence over their excellent friendship.

Sula breaks free from traditional gender roles and takes charge of her own life. Being a wife and mother are not necessary conditions for Sula's sense of identity. Neither her family nor her community have any say in her personal life business. She follows her intuition and what seems right. Not give in to the pressures of peer groupthink. Her sexual outlook reveals an independent and accomplished lady. To her, a woman is more than a sexual object for a man to use.

Sula died at the age of thirty. But her revelation about death shows the wisdom of sixty. Normally death inspires fear and horror, but for Sula, death is not at all frightening. She does not regret dying because she feels that she has "sung all the songs there are" (Sula 137). In the last moment of her life Sula is confident that she will be loved and remembered by the people of the community whose values she has discarded. She confidently asserts "they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me" (SULA 145). Through her death she asserts to us the possibility of ideal affirmative conditions of reciprocal recognition and the recovery of alienated and subordinate self.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Sula transcends the conventional boundaries of gender and race. The perception of the protagonist's identity extends beyond her gender, encompassing various aspects that contribute to her self-perception and how she is perceived by readers. Similarly, this principle applies to the concept of race. Sula's racial identity extends beyond conventional racial categorizations. She possesses an enigmatic nature that is exceedingly pronounced. In order to achieve a comprehensive representation of both groups. Her focus is not on preserving the race, but rather on self-preservation. The relationship depicted in Sula serves as a direct critique of black values and behavioral patterns, while also providing insight into Sula's true identity. She does not possess the qualities of evil or fixity, but rather embodies an unalterable state of being. On the contrary, the individual in question, characterized by a proclivity towards sensory perception and experimentation, in the final moments of her existence, Sula possesses a sense of assurance that she will be both cherished and memorialized by the members of the community, despite her deliberate abandonment of their established principles and beliefs. She asserts with confidence. In her demise, she posits the potential for an optimal state of mutual acknowledgment and the reclamation of estranged and subservient identity.

#### VI. REFERENCES

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