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Sula: The Meaning of That Little Girl Who Grew into a Woman

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Abstract

This article explores the symbolic significance of Sula Peace in Toni Morrison's Sula, arguing that her life and death signal a radical break from the Bottom community's stagnant moral codes and fatalistic worldview. Through close textual analysis, the essay contends that the mass death of the Bottom's residents near the novel's end marks the collapse of outdated social values—particularly the community's dependence on passive endurance, moral insularity, and gendered sacrifice. Rather than heeding Sula's call for revolutionary change, the community unites against her in superficial solidarity, ultimately sealing its own demise. Drawing on theory of the docility-brutality myth, the article further explores how Morrison critiques internalized racial and patriarchal norms. Sula emerges as a prophetic figure whose defiance challenges the social foundations of her environment and opens the possibility for a future unbound by repression and conformity. Her legacy, culminating in Nel's belated recognition of their shared truth, underscores Morrison's vision of a rebirth through rupture—where old beliefs must die for new perspectives to take root.

INTRODUCTION

By Introducing her protagonist late in the novel, after the prologue chapter and after introducing characters as diverse as Shadrack, Helen, Nel, Rochele, Eva, Hannah and by erasing her early, earlier than the reader expects, and earlier than her detesters, Morrison presents to us an ambiguous character whose actions are not easily open to interpretation. Sula's centrality in the novel is mentioned by the narrator much earlier than her appearance in the novel. As well as Shadrack and the inhabitants of the bottom, Sula is presented as one of centers of the multi-layered narrative:

In fact the question what Sula was all about has preoccupied critics since the very publication of the novel in 1973. The fact that Sula has been referred to as "Morrison's deliberate hypothesis" and her actions have been morally ambiguous (Spillers, 1987, p.183) reflects Morrison's deliberate act to present her as a dilemma and a puzzle. In an effort to analyze Sula and her meaning or message, Morrison's own hints are followed which require that we analyze her in line with the people of the Bottom and Shadrack.

I argue that the death of the people of the Bottom at the end of the novel is the death of traditional perspectives and the fulfillment of Sula's prophesy. In fact, the death of the inhabitants of the Bottom is inevitable. This would lead into a rebirth of a new community free from the restrictions of the old one. The insularity of the

Bottom and its severe vulnerability in the face of the impingements of the outside world makes its disappearance necessary. Their reunion in the face of Sula's rebellion was of no avail to them because their reunion was based on a false basis, from the very beginning. Instead of embracing Sula's mission, they clung to what in fact chained them, that is, they clung to their false social mores. These false notions include, sacrificing yourself (mostly women) for those who oppress you, passivity in the face of evil, and finally fear of revolutionary change. Sula represents the possibilities of new perspectives and her mission was to stand against stasis and fatalism. As the narrator says: "she was laughing at their God"(Morrison, 1982, p.115).

We should know that the only word which Shadrack speaks in the novel and which contains significant implications is addressed to Sula. The Word is "always" which in the daily speech we may use it numerous times, but Shadrack's "always" is central to the meaning of Sula and on the whole to the meaning of the novel. It will be referred to later because we have to start with Sula's relationship to the Bottom inhabitants who provoke and influence Sula's reaction to Shadrack's always; a reaction which was one of terror and guilt-consciousness.

WHAT DO WE CALL HER?

To Bottom-dwellers Sula was repeatedly referred to as 'evil' and as a 'pariah'. She is also referred to as "copperhead" by Jude (Morrison, 1982, p.103) and as a "scary black thing" by Nel's children (pp.97-98). The rose mark on her eye and Sula's birthmark did not have any special meaning in her childhood but as she grows up as well as darkening naturally, it would darken unnaturally, too. In order to understand why Sula came to be evil and a pariah in the eyes of the community of the Bottom, the point will be more understandable if we first read into her childhood and her household, for as we shall see her troubled childhood would influence largely on the Bottom-dwellers' hatred of her.

Sula grows into a household "where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove; where the mother, Hannah, never scolded or gave direction; where all sorts of people dropped in; where newspapers were stacked in the hallway, and dirty dishes left for hours at a time in the sink, and where a one-legged grandmother named Eva handed you goobers from deep inside her pockets or read you a dream"(Morrison, 1982, p.29). This observation made by Nel, is contrasted sharply with hers who "regarded the oppressive neatness of her home with dread" (p.29).

Although she is given the freedom to explore her thoughts, her household is in many ways troubled. Her grandmother Eva, after being abandoned by her husband, BoyBoy, is left to raise three children while she only, "had $1.65, five eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel" (p.32). In order to save her children, she leaves them to Mrs. Suggs and disappears for eighteen months. When she returns, she has only one leg and the reader understands through conversations between her neighbors that she has sacrificed her leg to get insurance money by putting it under a train. With the money she builds a large house and lets in a lot of stray waifs and married couples who cannot afford to rent a house on their own. Her act of sacrifice shows one of the themes of the novel. In a situation in which men frequently leave, black women's bizarre means of survival structure the novel.

But Sula's Mother, Hannah, exerts a great influence on her future rebellion. As the narrator tells us: "With the exception of BoyBoy, those Peace women loved all men. It was man love that Eva bequeathed to her daughters….The Peace women simply loved maleness, for its own sake"(p. 41). Hannah greatly influences Sula's sensuality in a house that everybody comes and goes, and because of Hannah's free ways, the little girl watched her mother make love to other men. When later Sula makes love to Ajax, she imitates her mother's way of pulling men into the pantry of the big house. Hannah did not want to live without attracting a man. She chose her friends' husbands and lovers. Her seduction was sweet. We read that she was careful who she slept with. Although she would have an intercourse with anyone, sleeping with someone was wholly different.

By Hannah's easy changing partners and easy ways, Sula learned that an affair was something pleasant. But Hannah's great influence on Sula

is more intensified when she overheard her mother saying to some women that: "I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" and Sula "only heard Hannah's words, and the pronouncement sent her flying up the stairs"(p.57). This event teaches Sula that there is no other that she could count on. This both hurts her future development and both strengthens her. It hurts her because knowing that one's own mother does not love you is equal to knowing that no one loves you. The pronouncement makes her have dark thoughts. Only "Nel's call Floated up and into the window, pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" (p.57). It strengthens her in that she learns she has to rely on her own capabilities and also the event is the source of her experimental life. She grows indifferent towards the people around her except Nel who "was the closest thing to both an other and a self" (p.119). The event provokes an almost lack of vulnerability in her character in the novel because it teaches her that she does not belong to the community and therefore she does not feel pity for their troubles.

As well as a sense of non-belonging and sex as pleasant, Sula learns some other lessons too. She, as well as Nell, "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" (p.52). She also learns from the very beginning that possession of a person is an absurd idea by watching her mother's example who "seemed too unlike them, having no passion attached to her relationships and being wholly incapable of jealousy" (p.44).

SEXISM IN SULA

The inhabitants of the Bottom hate Sula because she committed two irredeemable and unjustifiable acts. When Nel marries Jude, she disappears for ten years and goes to colleges in different cities. When She returns, she commits Eva to an elderly home. To the inhabitants of the bottom, respect to the elderly people was of primary importance. Sula by not respecting one of the strict rules of the Bottom that is veneration of old people comes to be seen as ungrateful and sassy. But the second important sin she commits is the most horrible and unforgivable act in the eyes of the community. It is rumored that she had some affairs with white people. The men of the bottom think that they have been stripped of their manhood and women think that she is a bit.., a prostitute. Morrison parodies and critiques what the whites did to blacks during the postwar era when the whites lynched and sometimes castrated black men. Sula's act makes men think that they have been castrated.

Morrison tacitly critiques men's regarding women as their chattel. Although Morrison, points to the traumas and suffering that black men experienced in the world wars and postwar lynching in the novel, she does not exempt them from the oppression that they exert upon black women. The men of the bottom have internalized the examples of racism. The idea of owning a woman is manifested in that they do not regard black women free enough to choose their partners. Morrison's comment, "my work requires me to think how free I can be as an African-American writer in my genderized, sexualized and wholly racialized world"(Morrison, 1992, p.23) critiques the sexism prevalent in her world as well as racism. Moreover, oppression of black women by black men of the bottom is more accentuated when they regard only black women's interracial intercourse, not black men's intercourse with white women as unforgivable.

Morrison's project, in the words of Etedali Rezapoorian and Sanchez, are an effort to "rehumanize" the black community by showing their ills and beauties concomitantly. Etedali Rezapoorian and Sanchez describe Zora Neale Hurston's works as "Hurston's fiction has an inherent power to rehumanize the African-American community, since it shows the bright and dark sides of a community subjected to a Black and white epistemology" (Etedali Rezapoorian and Sanchez, 2024, p.114). In the same way, Morrison's project is a rehumanization of the black community by showing how black people are complicated humans with the capability to empower and to do harm.

Sula challenges this notion of belonging to somebody else and she is sorry that her best friend, Nel has surrendered to such de-

individualizing notions. The idea of a black man as an owner of black women is something Morrison critiques severely in Sula. In *No Name in the Street*, a work which was written almost simultaneously with Sula, James Baldwin mentions that black men have been figuratively and literally castrated by the racism of the western tradition. He says that: "a man's balance depends on the weight he carries between his legs…the word genesis describes the male, involves the phallus, and refers to the seed which gives life…the slave knows however that his master be deluded on this point, that he is called a slave because his manhood has been, can be, or will be taken away from him. To be a slave means that one's manhood is engaged in a dubious battle indeed…in the case of American Slavery, the black man's right to his women, as well as his children, was simply taken from him"(Baldwin, 1972, pp.62-64). Baldwin's passage shows that he is taking the same procedures as the white racist did to slaves. He is following the steps of capitalism in its stress on ownership. Baldwin participates in the same system which regards owning a woman as one's right. Moreover he defines the slave as a male by his repetitious using of the male pronoun, ignoring the fact that women as well as men were slaves whose situation was much worse than the male slaves. Besides Baldwin rather than rejecting the male-oriented Christian Genesis, endorses it by saying that it merely "acknowledges maleness". He does so invoking the word "Phallus" as a symbol of power and authenticity.

Morrison parodies Baldwin's masculinist views in *Sula*, by drawing on the figure of Jude. In fact Baldwin's ideas much resemble Jude's who regards Nel as "the hem- the tuck and fold which hid his raveling edges"(82). Morrison both critiques Genesis and Baldwin's views by pointing to Jude's reducing Nel as part of himself:"The two of them together would make one Jude". (p.83)

Sula also inverts notions of male superiority during her sexual intercourses with different men. She asserts herself during the acts and proves herself as an active participant not like a passive victim.

Sula refuses to be bound by any social expectations, and this resistance triggers the community's condemnation of her as dangerous and immoral. This binary—between submissiveness and threat—echoes what Sayyed Navid Etedali Rezapoorian identifies as the myth of docility and brutality historically projected onto Black identities to stabilize white emotional economies. In his analysis of white scopophilia, Etedali Rezapoorian argues that Black individuals are denied psychological complexity and instead positioned to satisfy white spectatorship—either as harmless and compliant or as monstrous and threatening ((Etedali Rezapoorian, 2024, pp.120-122). Morrison subverts this logic by crafting a protagonist who transcends these limiting roles. Sula is neither a docile victim nor a brute; she is free, intelligent, and enigmatic, precisely the kind of subjectivity the dominant racial imagination seeks to erase.

Although her sensuality brings her boredom and loneliness, she is able during the act to assert her own active participation. But the question that arises is why does not Hannah become a pariah in the eyes of the people who, like Sula, frequently had se… and frequently changed partners? The answer is that while Hannah won hatred among the women of the Bottom, she treated the men as if they were complete and as if they were superior: "Hannah rubbed no edges, made no demands, made the man feel as though he were complete and wonderful just as he was-he didn't need fixing-and so he relaxed and swooned in the Hannah-light that shone on him simply because he was" (p.43). But Sula's casts men aside after she makes love with them and she never has sex with a man more than once, except for Ajax with whom she falls in love: Although Hannah was a nuisance, she made women feel proud because she needed their husbands. Sula, however tried them and then threw them away. Sula's act shows the men that she is not part of them and strips them of their false pride.

Instead Married women in Sula are pictured as "starched coffins" (p.122) letting themselves be owned by their men and Nel's wedding is described as a "funeral" (p.92). It is a funeral in that it was the death of her inner death. They also participate in the drama of regarding Sula as a "roach" or "bit…". Like Nel they simply help

the oppressors oppress them. The only voice which tried to make their voices heard was ignored.

Black men's oppression of Black women uses the same strategy of presence in absence. While No black man beats his wife or daughter in the novel or no man shouts at them or makes a woman marry by force, they frequently leave their wives with the responsibility of raising children. When Eva was young, BoyBoy, her husband, left her while she had almost no money. BoyBoy's escape made her lose one of her legs by putting it under a train in order to save her children from hunger. Before his escape BoyBoy "was very much preoccupied with other women and not home much. He did whatever he could that he liked and he liked womanizing best, drinking second and abusing Eva third" (p.32). He left in order to retrace his lost manhood, but when Plum was only three years old he paid a visit to Eva. While he tried to affect a "picture of prosperity and good will" by wearing shiny shoes and "citified straw hat", Eva, beneath his affectionate behavior, "saw defeat in the stalk of his neck and the curious tight way he held his shoulders"(pp.35-36) He tries to show off his citified manners by bringing with himself a woman who laughs wildly when BoyBoy whispers something in her ears. The scene terribly makes Eva angry because it possibly reminds her of the derogatory laughter and the hard experiences she had in cities when she put her leg under a train.

CHILDREN OF THE BOTTOM

Morrison in many ways pictures the black men of the Bottom as puerile. There are not few scenes in the novel which illustrates men as acting childlike. The deweys whom Eva takes in are doomed to remain boys. "A trinity with a plural name", the deweys are one of the wonders of the Bottom and they always remain aloof from the rest of the people. Despite the fact "that each dewey was markedly different from the other two" in the beginning, as time passes they resemble much like one another: "inseparable, loving nothing and no one but themselves"(pp.37-38) The teacher of the bottom school thought that it would be quite easy to tell them apart. But as time passed she found it almost impossible, like other inhabitants, to distinguish between them. The deweys would not allow it. The deweys did it deliberately. They made her confused and unable to analyze" (pp.37-38). While the mythical figures of the deweys may be Morrison's picture of her utopia in which there is no difference between all people of colors(the first dewey black boy, dewey two was a white and dewey three was a Mexican) signified by their lack of capital letters, they can also be Morrison's picture of men as child-like.

The redundant Boy in BoyBoy's name speaks for itself. Even Shadrack who is different from the other men in novel, with regard to his messianic mission as I discussed in chapter …, is not exempt from this epithet. We are told that the nurse "had tied them [the knots] into a double knot, the way one does for children"(p.12). Tar Baby,a character originated in folklores, behaves much like children. In an interview, Toni Morrison said the following about Tarbaby, asserting black men's puerility "Tar Baby is also a name, like 'nigger,' that white people call black children, black girls"(Bakerman, 1978, p.57). Tar Baby, who is named by Eva "out of a mixture of fun and meaness" is a heavy drinker and the narrator refers to him as a "mountain boy" despite the fact that at the moment of his appearance in the novel, he is an adult. He is pictured as a despicable character in the novel, who is certain to kill himself through drinking. Hannah at first was worried about him but she finds out that he is only looking for a place to die quietly. The women of the Bottom regard him with indifference because they thought his drinking to death is a sign of weakness: "There was, however, a measure of contempt in their indifference, for they had little patience with people who took themselves that seriously. Seriously enough to try to die"(Morrison, 1982, pp.40-41)

Barbara Lounsberry and Ann Hovet suggest that "Morrison seems to be making three points in depicting men as diminished in *Sula*. The first is to startle us and make us reexamine the traditional (indeed even feminist) perspective of all men as dominating presences. Morrison's second point relates specifically to black men and suggests that their development in particular is often stymied, stifled by the diminished possibilities for adult development offered black males by American society…A provocative third point which Morrison seems to

be making is that the diminishment of black males maybe caused by excessive "mothering", by both black wives and mothers, as well as social discrimination. Both Helene and Nel are oppressive, "excessive mothers"(Lounsberry and Ann Hovet, 1979, p.128). Although we can agree with Lounseberry and Ann Hovet on their first two suggestions, the third point is flawed. If we read into Nel's marriage we see that Jude's character was troubled far before his marriage. Secondly, this is Nel who is severely oppressed by Jude's diminishing him to a traditional woman by limiting her to house and children. Morrison herself rejects this view that black men have been castrated as a result of black women's matriarchy retorting that: "Everyone knows, deep down that black men were emasculated by white men, period. And black women didn't take any part in that"(Stepto, 1977, p.384).

What Ajax tells Jude makes their first means of oppression clearer: "Ax em to die for you and they yours for life"(p.83). And Jude succeeds to fulfil Ajax's advice, because away from Sula, Helen's influence on her daughter reappears: Her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had. Only With Sula did that quality have free reign, but their friendship was so close, they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's. During all of her girlhood the only respite Nel had had from her stern and undemonstrative parents was Sula" (p.83). Sula is the only character who challenges these detracting views. She does not let herself be trapped in the same snare that Nel was trapped. Her refusal to marry and have babies stems from her refusal to take the full responsibilities of raising children after her supposed husband leaves her and she also refuses to raise babies who, like the deweys, will "remain boys in mind".

HOW DOES SULA HELP BOTTOM-DWELLERS?

The people of the Bottom ascribe all disasters that are brought upon them to Sula. She becomes a scapegoat onto whom all misery is pinned. As Houshmand (2024a) insightfully argues in his study of *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison historicizes the Black experience to emphasize how systemic erasure under white cultural norms has fractured Black communal bonds and made Black female solidarity essential for survival.

When Teapot comes to collect the milk bottles, he accidentally falls down the step. Following this incident everyone calls Sula a witch who has no mercy towards a little son. The fact that when they take him to the hospital the doctor said: Poor diet had contributed substantially to the daintiness of his bones" (p.114) does not change their minds that Sula is evil. Other incidents such as Mr. Finley's accidental death happening when she saw Sula and the plague of robins are ascribed to her. Paradoxically Sula's rebellion against the social mores of the extremely insular people of Bottom and their belief that Sula is an evil and a pariah help them in many ways. It helps them to care about each other more than ever. Their belief that she is evil sets an example for them to pay more attention to each other. Teapot's mother who "was called Teapot's Mamma because being his mamma was precisely her major failure" began to cherish his son and "immersed herself in a role she had shown no inclination for: motherhood". Women who complained about their husbands' womanizing "cherished their men more, soothed the pride and vanity Sula had bruised"(pp.113-115). In fact the people of the Bottom needed a stranger to help them define themselves.

In fact what Sula does for the people of the Bottom is that she makes them move; for the people of the Bottom had a deterministic view towards things. They never tried to change things. The Bottom-dwellers were passive creatures who had got used to oppression. Sula on the other hand, is a symbol of change. When the narrator is describing the friendship between Nel and Sula, we are told that Nel is consistent but Sula "could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes"(p.53). Moreover when she and Nel were playing together near the river of the Bottom, Chicken Little, a little boy is accidentally drowned. Sula, her eyes full of tears and her heart beating with a pang of guilt, heads toward Shadrack's cottage that is along the river. It is here which Shadrack tells her the only word he speaks in the text: "always". The pronouncement makes Sula extremely afraid and she runs towards Nel outside Shadrack's cottage crying that: ""he said, 'Always. Always'"".

The word frightens her because-as well as meaning that the trauma of Chicken Little's death would haunt her for ever- it also means that she is a strong advocate of change. When Nel later is thinking about Sula and Jude's affair and is immersed in sorrow, She remembers Sula saying to her: ""The real hell of Hell is that it is forever"…she said doing anything forever and ever was hell"(pp.107-108).

But Shadrack does not understand (but he would unconsciously grasp later when he hauls people towards death) is that Sula's mission is to, permanently, erase permanency out of the Bottom. On the other hand, the people of the bottom have a deterministic view towards things. Their idea that the purpose of evil is to survive it, rather than to fight against it, is the source of their misfortunes. They do not fight against the evil of racism, for instance, which has rendered them incapable of getting jobs in the New River Project. For they think that:

In their world, aberrations were as much a part of nature as grace. It was not for them to expel or annihilate it. They would no more run Sula out of town than they would kill the robins that brought her back, for in their secret awareness of him, He was not the God of three faces they sang about. They knew quite well that He had four, and that the fourth explained Sula. They had lived with various forms of evil all their days, and it wasn't that they believed God would take care of them. It was rather that they knew God had a brother and that brother hadn't spared God's son, so why should he spare them?(p.118)

Sayyed Navid Etedali Rezapoorian's (2024) analysis of the docility myth provides further insight into this passivity. In his study of the caricatures attributed to black people, he argues that the myth of Black docility functions as a crucial tool to maintain control and justify inaction. This myth not only reduces Black identity to a tolerable, non-threatening presence, but also encourages endurance rather than resistance. In Morrison's Sula, the residents' acceptance of suffering and injustice echoes this internalized myth. Their failure to protest systemic racism is not just a product of external oppression, but also of an inherited narrative that equates survival with submission. Sula's rebellion, then, is radical not only because she disrupts social norms, but because she refuses to accept docility as a virtue.

Sula personifies the strange world beyond Medallion, Ohio, and is evil, in part, because her values are foreign to the homogeneity of this black community. Sula personifies a xenophobic anxiety over otherness and, by her very presence, forces the community to examine its own self image constantly"(Bryant, 1990, p.741). Sula's presence gives a kinetic energy to the people of the bottom. Sula's ambiguous position within the community echoes the figure of the tragic mulatta reconfigured to expose intraracial boundaries and the community's unease with racial and sexual nonconformity (Houshmand, 2025b).

The revolution that she brings into the insular Bottom resembles much like Jesus's rebellion who came to invert hierarchies and challenge social norms. Paradoxically while Jesus was the prince of peace, he came to as mentioned in bible to: "bring sword, not peace". This paradox exists in Sula as well. While she, her surname Peace suggests anti-war themes, bestirred motion and chaos in the Bottom, In fact her project was to make a war against the constricting social mores and also against the stasis of the Bottom. This seeming paradox can be resolved if we see that peace in the Bottom will be achieved if Sula manages to win her war. When Nel says that no one loves you she wittingly answers that "when everybody in the bottom does the opposite of what is expected, when all blacks have affairs with white people, when white women begin to cherish black men and when black girls have affairs with anyone they like, then they begin to love me" (Morrison, 1982, p.123).

Sula's answer implies categories must be collapsed so that people will love her. If the false social mores which bind women of the Bottom are inverted, then she will no more be the "pariah" of the community. As mentioned earlier her simultaneous role as a peace maker and war maker makes her resemble Jesus. In fact, she is the conglomeration of different prophets in the bible. Morrison frequently drew on bible for the creation of her fiction, Including the Babylonian captivity of the Isralalites. Patricia Hunt states that: "Among Sula's many connections to the Bible is her name: Sula is anagram of Saul and

Sula Mae is nearly anagrammatic Samuel; moreover the family name, Peace, echoes the epithet for Jesus, Prince of Peace. Recalling that the books of Samuel are centrally concerned with war, Sula's name incorporates, and collapses together, both war and peace. With parabolic complexity, Sula Peace, like the Prince of Peace, "comes not to send peace but a sword" (Hunt, 1993, p.445).

So Sula tries to create something else which fills the emptiness, brought upon her as a result of the oppressive behavior of people, mostly men, in her life. She begins to experiment with everything. However, experimenting with everything is dangerous. Sula's estrangement from Nel creates a sort of vacuum in her life. What Sula lacks is a center, an other with whom she can define herself. Sula's experimentation is devoid of a testing ground. Nel could provide that center, that axis around which she could develop her potentials. Sula's experimentation proves fatal to her; because for the first time, she begins to feel what possessiveness is. Her relationship with Ajax at first seems to provide her with that center. Ajax is attracted to Sula because he sees that she is different with other women in the Bottom. She would not possibly chain him to a nest. "Her elusiveness and indifference to established habits of behavior reminded him of his mother… that this was perhaps the only other woman he knew whose life was her own, who could deal with life efficiently, and who was not interested in nailing him." (Morrison, 1982, p.127).

And Sula, as usual wanted to probe into everything. She was curious to know the man whom many years ago told her the filthy epithet "pig meat". Their relationship at first proves fortunate but Sula's experimentation drops her in the same trap other women had been snared: "Sula began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it" (p.131). Her jealousy is symbolized by wearing a green ribbon and also the disruptive hyphens preceding the passage, which are inserted only two times in the novel, one before describing the passage which describes the loss of friendship between Nel and Sula and the other preceding the passage which was quoted above. Both the color and the ribbon itself are associated with traditional notions of jealousy and femininity. The result is clear. Following the fashion of other men in the novel, Ajax takes off because he "detected the scent of the nest"(p.133). In a sense, Ajax did the right thing to Sula. Because firstly, Sula's mania for probing into Ajax would have led her possibly to murder him.

She desired to probe into Ajax's skin to know what there is beneath his attractive skin. Secondly, Sula's discovery of possessiveness would have brought her the same fate as Nel's, that is subservience and loss of self. Sula, following Ajax's departure, becomes terribly sick and then dies. Her death does not stem from loss of Ajax. Because at her death bed, she still clings to her rebellious ideas. Instead, it stems from the fact that for Sula's pure breath the filth of capitalistic notions of possessiveness or ownership is fatally detrimental. The recovery from this disease is hardly possible for Sula who, from the beginning of her life, was used to share everything with Nel " the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed, what line he used with one and then the other". But unlike Nel, she soon understands that she had taken a serious risk. Following the departure of Ajax, Sula understands that she was not firm with him from the beginning of their relationship: ""I did not hold my head stiff enough when I met him and so I lost it just like the dolls"". Sula's death stems from her mourning for her lost self. The impurity of the false notions of ownership was too much for her pure breath.

Following her death the people of the Bottom thought fortune would smile on their faces. But on the contrary, her death made them retrogress into their old habits. The chaos and kinetic life which she bestirred in the Bottom died away. It remains Shadrack's job to fulfill Sula's mission. Shadrack's close relation to Sula led her to drive people towards their deaths. His meeting with Sula exerted a profound influence on him. He saw Sula's birthmark as a tadpole, which was the fish he loved. He saw her as a goddess who appears in the sea in the form of a fish. Whenever he sees her, he begins to tip his hat as a sign of respect. It was, while thinking about her, long after Sula's death, that he was inspired to perform the last National Suicide Day. He appears as Sula's instrument to kill the old, restricting perspectives.

After her epiphanic realization that all she lacks is Sula, Nel, can be the second Sula who would be able to be the originator of new perspectives. Nel realizes that her marriage with Jude ruined her possibility for cherishing change that is the mission of Sula. Her possibility to change into a second Sula is signified in the end of the narrative when Shadrack sees Nel and thinks she is Sula. As Michelle Pessoni (1995) asserts: "the great Goddess archetype which appears in Morrison's novels functions as a unifying force, connecting human beings to one another and to nature in moral, social, and psychological interdependence. Morrison's characters are all in desperate need of such spiritual connection because they inhabit disconnected and nonregenerative patriarchal societies"(p.440). In fact what the people of the Bottom lacked was embracing this goddess rather than labeling her as a "pariah". Nel finally realizes the significance of this goddess figure. The novel suggests that the possibility of the rebirth of this goddess figure is Nel herself.

But "she is only beginging" as asserted by Morrison herself. She has long lived under the oppressive force of sexism and racism. But her reunion with Sula can save her from these oppressive forces. By endorsing Sula' mission, Nel also realizes that women's emancipation from sexist and racist oppression is only possible through a firm union between women: ""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 "girl,girl,girlgirlgirl""(p.174). I believe the character Sula, despite her foibles, is Morrison's ideal black woman. Her challenge to western patriarchal values such as destructive competition, greed for money and her challenge to sexist definitions of women as descended from the rib of the man, is what Morrison suggests that black women endorse and nurture. If not the ideal black woman, she is at least the beginning of what an ideal black woman would be. Morrison suggests the possibility at the end of the novel when Nel realizes that her salvation is through a continuation of Sula's mission. Perhaps the New Nel would cover the weaknesses that Sula evinced throughout the novel.

CONCLUSION

In *Sula*, Morrison crafts a prophetic figure whose defiance of communal norms exposes the limitations of a society shackled by its own myths of docility, gendered sacrifice, and fatalism. Sula's life and death are not personal but paradigmatic—a rupture that paves the way for potential rebirth. Though misunderstood in her time, Sula's legacy persists in Nel's final awakening, suggesting that transformation can arise through painful recognition. The novel ends not with Sula's condemnation, but with the quiet emergence of a new consciousness that may one day fulfill her radical vision.

While this article focuses on Sula's subversive role and the thematic implications of communal collapse, further research might explore how Morrison situates Sula within broader transnational frameworks. Additionally, deeper comparative work with other Black female protagonists who similarly unsettle their social environments could offer further insight into Morrison's critique of communal conformity and her vision of individual autonomy.

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