Interpretation of the Feminism in the Work Sula

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Abstract: Toni Morrison focuses on the spiritual world of black women in her masterpiece Sula, portraying Sula, Nell and other black women who suffer from subject identity crisis, reflecting on the problem of female subject consciousness and revealing that women's subject consciousness can be re-established through their own efforts. This paper is intended to explore the characteristics of different female characters in the novel and their own stories from the postmodern feminism perspective argued by Hélène Cixous, taking into account the character traits and life experiences of the main female characters in the novel. Taking Sula, Nell and Eva as examples, the analysis of their stories reveals that all these black women have a strong sense of resistance. The awakening of their own subjective consciousness continues throughout their lives, and this is also consistent with the postmodern feminism argued by Hélène Cixous.

Keywords: Postmodern Feminism; *Sula*, Nell, Eva; Hélène Cixous, Female Characteristics.

1. Introduction

Toni Morrison, an outstanding contemporary black American woman writer, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, becoming the first African American writer in the world to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Sula is one of Morrison's most beloved works, and it is also the most representative of her creative characteristics and ideas. By describing the fate of three typical black women, Eva, Sula and Nell, the novel shows the pain and hardship of black women in their quest for equality and freedom under the triple oppression of race, gender and class.

In the 1970s, with the rise of feminist literary studies, the reconstruction of female subject consciousness embodied in Morrison's books began to receive attention. Known as the "pioneer of feminism," Beauvoir proposed existential feminism from the philosophical perspective of the subject-object relationship and became the founder of the new feminism. In her book The Second Sex, Beauvoir elaborated on existential feminism by focusing on the dichotomy of the sexes and the identity of the female "other".

Hélène Cixous argues that women "use their bodies to express their thoughts" [2], and she hopes that by regaining dominion over their bodies, women can break away from the patriarchal values that have been imposed on them, and through the renewal of their ideology "deconstructing the absolute control over women's bodies with men as the main body" [3], and rebuilding the sense of subjectivity. Xiura’ s total domination of body and sex completely breaks the established notion of

male selection of women, which is her silent and strong confrontation with the male social culture [1].

In the past, scholars in China have focused on the study of women's images in the work or the friendship among different women. In addition, there are also studies on the work from the perspective of critical discourse. Foreign scholars have focused on the alienation of the characters' behavior or the construction of their sense of identity.

However, there is no scholar has analyzed the feminism in the work from the perspective of postmodern feminism. Therefore, this essay will analyze the feminism embodied by different female characters in the work Sula from Hélène Cixous' postmodern feminist perspective, mainly taking Sula, Nell and Eva as examples.

The main parts of this paper could be divided into four parts. The first part is about Eva's story and the feminism it embodies. The second part is about Sula's Story and the feminism it embodies. The third part is about Nell's story and the feminism it embodies. And the last part is about feminist commonalities in the work, which is the awakening of subjectivity.

By analyzing the work from these four sections, different women's stories and the feminist it embodies could be shown. What's more, the commonalities of the work could also be found in the last.

2. The Stories of Different Female Characters and the Feminism Embodied

2.1. Eva's Story and the Feminism it Embodies

Eva's stoic image is a challenge to the traditional image of black women as cowards. Forced to make a living, she decisively chooses to let a train run over her leg in exchange for insurance money to support her young child.

Eva takes a determined stance toward rebellion. For a long time, black women have borne the burden of life and mental oppression without complaint, they need to confirm the meaning of their existence through marriage, once they are free from the role of wife and mother, they will be in a panic, and eventually the light of humanity in them is extinguished, women are reduced to the subordination of the whole society. Eva, Hula's grandmother, is abandoned after marrying Boyboi and having three children. When Boiboi left home, Eva had only $1.65, five eggs, three beets and a heart of nothing. After that, she fell into a difficult situation, relying on neighbors to help her survive the cold winter, but her strong self-esteem made her unable to tolerate the life of a subordinate, and she bravely went to the road of rebellion. Ignoring the eyes of others, Eva gave up one of her legs in a form of almost self-harm in exchange for insurance money, which gave

She has the capital to live. She built a house on Carpenter Road and retreated to the second floor to become the queen of the house, she did not have to look up to others, by sacrificing one leg, Eva gained financial independence, she used extreme ways to redeem herself and her family. In a black community where most women are dependent on their husbands for survival, Eva makes a way for herself with a ruthless gesture. Another example of Eva's rebellious stance is her burning of her beloved son by her own hand. In her view, she gave her children life and had the right to end their lives as well. Returning from the war, Plum is immersed in panic and despair and spends his life sleeping and taking drugs. Eva cannot bear to see her favorite son so weak. She wants Li Zi to live like a real man, but there is nothing she can do. Since living is so hard for Reiko, let him die like a man. Eva used a fire to end Li Zi' s life. It is better to live without dignity than to die. Eva becomes an active creator from a passive victim, her hatred for her husband stimulates her to become independent, and her love for her son makes her end Li Zi' s life with her own hands. As a representative of the older generation of black women, Eva has witnessed the historical changes of the "bottom of heaven" community, where black people have long been powerless, silenced,

suppressed and humiliated, and black women are even more helpless in the community, suffering from both physical and mental bullying, and in a desperate situation of collective silence. While Eva refuses to passively wait for life's merciless verdict, her hatred of abandonment and love for her children inspire a deep rebellion in her heart, and while achieving self-redemption, she becomes a spiritual leader of the younger generation.

2.2. Sula's Story and the Feminism it Embodies

In a self-exiled way, Sula gives us an example of the search for self and spiritual independence. She pursues equal rights with men and does the things of a man as a woman. She rebels against her mother and grandmother, betrays her best friend, and stirs up resentment in her community for her unconventional behavior. In this way, she seeks to be herself until the end of her life [7].

In the novel, there is a phrase which means that in the perception of black women, they are "another existence that is neither white nor male - the antithesis of freedom and success". This almost resigned comment points out the awkward status of black women: the losers who are characterized by their skin color and gender. Under such an invisible shackle, many women find their place in life by distorting themselves in a perverse way. For example, Nell's mother, Helena, initially had a bad impression of Sula, saying that "Sula's mother is as black as coal", which is a way for the black community to seek a weak sense of self-worth by discriminating against people with a darker skin color than their own after fully accepting skin color as a standard of evaluation. Then again, in looking at the relationship between men and women, the women living at the bottom see men as the pillars of life, the fast enablers, and the sources of suffering. From birth to death, generations of black women living at the "bottom" repeat the trajectory of their fate, due to their inferior skin color, gender disadvantage and family oppression. This cold truth becomes more and more naked and piercing in the author's calm description of daily life, which makes the outsiders reading the book heavy and makes people ponder who are the more fortunate ones in this trajectory of fate, whether they have closed their eyes and lived their lives.

The women in this trajectory of fate are the more fortunate ones, the "women of the town" who have closed their eyes and buried their lives so that they can die, or the Sula who has opened her eyes, despairing and then struggling to die a swift death? Sula once said, "Hell is hell because it has no head." "It is hell to do things over and over again that have no end in sight." This hell is life, and everything you do without self-awareness is like living in hell. Hidayat is a person who has opened her eyes, a person who has full self-awareness. At the end of Sula's life, she had this conversation with her friend Nair.

"I know what every black woman in this country is doing?"

"Doing what?"

"In death. Just like me. But the difference is they're dying like stumps, and me, I'm falling down like a redwood. I'm sure I've lived in this world."

"Really? And what do you have to prove it?"

"Proof? To whom? O girl, I have my own mind, and the thoughts in it. That is to say, I own myself."

"Alone, right?"

"Yes, but my solitude is my own. Now your loneliness is another person’s. Made by others and passed on to you."

The message of this short conversation can be profound. But we only look at it from the perspective of an awakened sense of self, unlike "every black woman in this country," Sula's self is distinct and every black woman in this country," Sula's self is distinct, albeit alone, but increasingly like a redwood She is lonely, but more and more stubborn and distinct like a redwood. It is easy to

see that at the end of her life, looking back on her short life, Hidayat has a strong sense of herself. At the end of her life, Sula, who has looked back on her short life, reveals her true heart to her best friend, which is She is not ashamed of herself, she has no regrets about her choices, and she laughs at the self-deception of those who have been blindfolded and allowed to live. She is not ashamed of herself and her choices. Measured by the quality of life, the untimely death of Sula wasn't a pity. The other people who live in chaos for a long time are a tragedy without words

2.3. Nell's Story and the Feminism it Embodies

Through her childhood rebellion, her conservative marriage, and finally her epiphany, Nell carried forward the spirit of Sula's search. Nell's epiphany gives us a glimpse of the path and hope that black women seek for themselves.

Like Sula, Nell has had a rebellious spirit since she was a child. Because of the similarity of her life, the places and occasions where she developed her "rebellious spirit" and showed her "masculinity" were also strikingly similar to those of Sula. Like Sula, she does not like her home. She finds her clean home "depressing" and "disgusting," but surprisingly "prefers Sula's rough and simple home". In that home "There was always a pot or something sitting on the stove ..... and all kinds of people came to visit, newspapers were neatly stacked in the hallway, and dirty dishes could sit in the sink for hours at a time". The lack of "order The lack of "order" and "neatness" is often seen as a sign of "masculinity". Seurat's disorganized home can be seen as a metaphor for the typical bachelor's home. Nell's preference for such a home, however, seems to be a rebellion against the role of motherhood and a yearning for the role of masculinity. Because, in the black community, the burden of maintaining a well-organized home, which requires more energy, often falls on the women, Nell does not want to repeat her mother's mistakes.

3. Feminist Commonalities in the Works - The Awakening of Subjectivity

When Sula was a little girl, she was deeply desperate because of her mother's dislike of her words, and when she was playing by the river, she inadvertently caused the drowning of a "chick", and realized that not only could she rely on no one, she could not even trust herself. This pushed Sula further into rebellion. She stands by indifferently watching her mother being burned alive, but finds it very amusing that she does not want to take on the family responsibility of caring for the elderly and puts Eva in a nursing home, which is unfilial; she seduces the men of the community and has sex with them once and then kicks them away, even her best friend's husband, which is unrighteous; she goes to church without underwear and desecrates her religious beliefs, which is disrespectful.

If the traditional concept of the black community is to be judged, Sula’s rebellious behavior is bad which caused her to be rejected and isolated by the black community, and people felt disgusted and disgusted with her. People felt disgusted and disgusted with her and blamed her for all the disasters. Yet, fundamentally, Sula is a hero for black women. She strongly resisted the traditional life of women and did not want to be a sacrifice to male society. She left home after Nell's marriage to pursue her education and independence in the pursuit of her dreams. After Nell's marriage, she leaves her hometown to pursue her own education and to pursue her own ideals independently, not wanting to obey society's value position for women She does not want to conform to society's value of women, which is to get married and have children. At the same time, she dares to assert her own needs, having sex with men in the community once and then abandoning them. She challenges male authority and refuses to see male interests as superior to all others. She refuses to put men's interests above everything else and takes the initiative in the relationship between men and women, using her sexual debauchery as a way to counter the benefits of a patriarchal society. She uses her sexual debauchery as a weapon to fight against the patriarchal society. Sula's deviance is against the

traditional values of the black community. She also subverts the male authority under the husband's system of power and breaks away from the stereotypes. But this life also costs her the price of dying alone. With her "evil deeds", Sula inspires the black community to search for goodness. The self-consciousness of black women begins to sprout, and she uses her loneliness to exchange for the awakening of everyone.

Nell, who takes a rational stance toward rebellion, represents the journey of most black women. From the infinite longing for life to the cold reality that drives them to the dead end of life, the rebellion of this group will be the most powerful and long-lasting. Nell realized that she was an independent individual, that she was subordinate to no one, and that her strong inner sense of rebellion made her whole being alive on the train when she visited her grandmother with her mother at an early age. But after marriage, Nell accepts the black community's position on women's social status and value in life, and is willingly reduced to a male subordinate. She loses herself in the way of submissiveness, and the concept of marital power of the husband's system makes Nell lose her right to speak. But even a good woman like Nell, who submits to male authority, still finds it hard to escape the fate of being abandoned by her husband. When she finds out that Jude is having an affair with Sula, instead of blaming her husband for his infidelity, she puts all the blame on Sula and breaks off the relationship with her from then on. After receiving a fatal blow from love and friendship, Nell is plunged into an abyss of pain. But after 30 years, Nell realizes the value of Hidira' s existence and begins to reflect on his self-identity when a chance visit to Eva stirs up old memories. In a sense, Sula is a guide for black women's independence and freedom. After a great enlightenment, Nell follows the path Sula has not yet taken.

Compared to the satanic rebellion of Sula, Nell's rebellion is gentle and gradual. The two rebellious black girls encourage each other at the beginning of their search for self-identity, then they break up, and then Sula's early death, Nell goes through a tortuous journey from the loss of self-identity to the awakening of self-awareness. The "self" in Nell's heart essentially metamorphoses and forms along the "Sula model" after despair. Nell breaks free from the shackles that confine black women physically and mentally, and takes a brave step to reconstruct her female self-identity with the courage and boldness of Sula.

4. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the female characters in the work Sula by applying the theory of postmodern feminism suggested by Hélène Cixous. The discussion of the female characters focuses on three women: Sula, Nell and Eva. By analyzing their individual stories and analyzing the feminism the stories have embodied, commonalities among the female characters in this work could be found. The analysis reveals that the commonality of the female characters in this work lies in the awakening of their own subjective consciousness, which is also in line with Hélène Cixous' postmodern feminism theory.

Sula's lifelong search for herself is also the process of growing up as an independent and mature black woman. The process of growing up as an independent and mature black woman. In the process of finding herself, Sula is also the growth of an independent and mature black woman. The world of the "bottom" depicted by Morrison is also deeply saddened by the fact that the inner part is as poor as the outer part. The inner world is as poor as the outer world, and the self-repression is as ferocious as the repression of others. The more Sula struggles, the more the forces pulling her toward. The more Sula struggles, the stronger the force that pulls her into the abyss, the more the reader is shaken, and then, as the author The more the reader is shocked, and then, as the author falls into deep thought for a while, he hears the author's anguished cry: Self-awakening! Women awaken! Women awaken! The black community awakens!

The awakening of female subject consciousness means that women as subjects have a clearer perception of their position, role and value in the objective world. Women believe that they are no longer subordinate to men and focus more on their own development and problem solving. After liberation, black women still suffer from oppression and discrimination in their lives. The work *Sula* undoubtedly portrays the process and spirit of black women at the bottom of the society who rise up to fight against it. Whether in terms of gender, race or tradition, they are brave enough to shout for themselves and defend their rights. This is also the case with the three women in the work *Sula*, who continue to break through and seek status and development for themselves in one attempt after another.

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