



Exploring Feminine Sensuality: A Comparative Analysis Of Toni Morrison's 'The Bluest Eye' And 'Sula' With Alice Walker's 'Meridian'

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, prominent voices in African American literature, illuminate various facets of black life, particularly the experiences of black women. Their works delve into the intersections of race, class, and gender oppression within a predominantly white American society. This paper examines the theme of sexuality in Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" and "Sula," as well as Walker's "Meridian." Both authors candidly portray the struggles and marginalization faced by black women under male patriarchy. This analysis highlights how Morrison and Walker address sexual themes in their novels, a topic previously unexplored in traditional African American literature.

Keywords: sexism, exploitation, racism, classism, sexuality

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, two prominent figures in African American literature, address various societal issues such as racism, sexism, classism, and child abuse. They vividly portray the experiences of marginalization and exploitation faced by black individuals, particularly black women. Kavita Arya's analysis of Morrison's work emphasizes its focus on the harsh realities of racial, sexual, and economic discrimination in America. Conversely, Alice Walker, credited with coining the term 'Womanism,' empowers African American women to take charge of their own lives. Gerri Bates notes Walker's skill in presenting her characters with opportunities for growth and collective empowerment, making renewal a central theme in her narratives. Morrison and Walker share both similarities and differences in their exploration of sexism within their novels. In works like "The Bluest Eye," "Sula," and "Meridian," they depict gender oppression while also aiming to unveil female sexuality. Both authors belong to the African American literary tradition and strive to uplift the fortunes of black individuals, especially black women, amidst a society marked by racism, classism, and male dominance. They portray the resilience of black women against societal prejudices, as noted by E. Demirturk's analysis of African American women's literature. Within these narratives, Morrison and Walker shed light on women's experiences of victimization due to gender while also presenting nuanced depictions of sexual relationships. They candidly explore women's sexual desires to underscore the importance of sexual pleasure for women, rooted in the notion of individual freedom.

The horrific discovery that Pecola, a female youngster, is pregnant at the beginning of *The Bluest Eye* (1970) indicates that the book contains explicit sexual implications. Morrison criticizes the male patriarchy for mistreating the women both intellectually and sexually. The feminine sexuality is briefly revealed in the novel. It illustrates how women in general and Black women specifically end up as the objects of lust for men. Morrison intentionally exposed female sexuality in the book by using sexual connotations. There are numerous instances in the book where the author overuses sexual imagery. Mr. Henry, one of the supporting characters, tries to harass Frieda, Pecola's acquaintance. Following the event, Claudia, her sister, is curious about what transpired. Claudia appears to be in he is curious about how her sister is doing. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* may have felt when Mr. Henry harassed her. It demonstrates the adolescent female children's curiosity about sex. The girls' inclination for sex steadily grows as they mature into women, and Pauline in the book *The Bluest Eye* effectively captures this yearning, as does *Sula* through Sula, Eva, Hannah, and Nel. Morrison portrays a sensual husband-wife relationship in *The Bluest Eye*. A scene where Cholly and his wife Pauline are shown having love exposes a woman's craving for sex. Pauline is stated in a previous encounter with Cholly that she is a lady who has fantasies about guys. "Pauline was fifteen, still keeping house, but with less enthusiasm," the narrator describes. Her hands and thoughts were being pulled away from her work by

fantasies about men, love, and touching (88). She is portrayed as a woman who is excitedly awaiting a man to whom she wants to make love before getting married. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison—a gifted storyteller—describes the pleasure a woman experiences after engaging in sexual activity with her spouse. As Pauline tells her story of making love, the novel's sexual undertone is also revealed in the moment where Cholly falls in love with a rustic girl. "Come on, coon," two white males try to make Cholly feel inferior. quicker. You ain't giving her nothing at all (116). The novel's most tragic scene is when Cholly rapes Pecola, his own daughter. The narrator writes in a totally unusual style here as well, which makes you want to read more. "Cholly raised his other hand to her hips to save her from falling," the narrator says he lowered his head and began to bite at her leg's back then a surge of need swept down his genitalia, lengthening it and softening his anus's lips. There was a barrier surrounding all of this lust.

Morrison's 1976 novel *Sula* also features sexual implications in a similar manner. Morrison has employed sexuality as the central theme of this book. There are two families in the book. Wright and Peace both. The women of the Peace household are completely engrossed in making love. Eva, Sula's grandma, is spotted flirting and enjoying the company of men. The Peace women, according to the author, "simply loved maleness, for its own sake." Even though Eva was elderly and only had one leg, she received many calls from men, and even though she didn't engage in romantic gestures, there was a lot of laughter and taunting. The males were drawn to her gorgeous calves, which tidy like her mother Eva, Sula's mother Hannah also engages in sexual activity. Hannah was picky about who she slept with, as the novelist puts it. She was willing to screw almost anything, but having sex with someone seemed to be implying a certain amount of commitment and trust for her. She consequently became a daylight lover, and Sula only ever discovered her mother cuddled up in a man's arms in the bed after she returned from school (43–44). Hannah will make love to any man at anytime, anywhere, without hesitation. Morrison portrays her as a stand-in for a group of young black women who saw pursuing their sex as the one and only true purpose in life. Similar to her mom Hannah.

Sula is pursuing sex because she wants to stand out from the crowd in society. Regarding her, Sayyed Mujahid writes: "She rejects traditional sexual modes." moreover, functioning on the tenet that sex is non-competitive and non-threatening while rejecting the "ownership" aspect of marriage (85). The notion of female sexuality is projected in the book by the characters Hannah and Sula. The sexuality that seeks to empower women challenges the patriarchy of men in the culture. "A provider of sex like Hannah in *Sula* is universally disapproved of, but never seriously resented by the rest of the community," claims Jayita Sengupta on Hannah and Sula. Sula uses Jude to fill a void inside herself, while Hannah adds to and consumes from the group's male pool (131).

Nel witnesses them sharing intimate moments. According to Vijay Digambar Songire: *A Comparative Analysis of Female Sexuality in Alice Walker's Meridian and Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Sula* "They had been down on all fours naked, not touching except their lips right down there on the floor where the tie is pointing to, on all fours like (uh, huh, go on, say it) like dogs," she describes in the novel (105). In the book, Sula has sex with several different men. Because Sula's actions have overt sexual implications, the people of Medallion do not appreciate her behaviour. She sleeps with Jude without hesitation. Later on, she is engaged to Ajax, a young Black man without a job. They both like having sex. In the book, Sula fully embraces her sexuality. Morrison portrays Sula as a lady who defies the societal expectations that were placed on black women in the African American culture. Thus, the community members denounce her. They accuse Sula of the unforgivable—the path from which there was no going back, the dirt that would never be cleaned away—as the narrator puts it. It was said that Sula had affairs with white males (112). Morrison has approached sex differently in each of his works. In both stories, she emphasizes how women are simple pickings for men to satisfy their sexual cravings while also making sexual fulfilment a requirement for women. Pauline in the book, Sula fully embraces her sexuality. Morrison portrays Sula as a lady who defies the societal expectations that were placed on black women in the African American culture. Thus, the community members denounce her. They accuse Sula of the unforgivable—the path from which there was no going back, the dirt that would never be cleaned away—as the narrator puts it. It was said that Sula had affairs with white males (112).

The topic of female sexuality is also covered in Alice Walker's 1976 novel *Meridian*, as well as in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. There are some parallels and differences in how female sexuality is portrayed in the reputable books. Like Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*, Eva in *Sula*, and Hannah in *Sula*, *Meridian*, the main character of *Meridian*, does not relish having sex with her husband Eddie. She seems to be uninformed about sex. The author states, "She had had sex as often as her lover desired it, sometimes every single night, while not enjoying it at all. Additionally, she examined herself closely in the mirror every morning before boarding the school bus since she had heard that having sex causes one's hips to enlarge (56).

Having reached adolescence, she lacks understanding of sexual matters. "Although she becomes a mother, it is important to note that she is the victim of sexual violence and does not enjoy sex with her boyfriend," notes Napolita Simanga about her (51–52). She appears to be a neglected person at home. Her mother does not give her any advice regarding having sex. Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* both deal with the same situation. Pecola has no idea how her own female body feels. When she gets her period for the first time, she gets puzzled and only Mrs. Mac Teers knows about it.

Meridian is perceived as a victim of the male patriarchy in the society where women are taken advantage of due to their gender, much as Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. *Meridian* is initially enticed by a young adolescent while she is in the book, mulatto George Dexter is named. There are several scenes in the book that Alice

Walker bluntly depicts in order to highlight how women are victimized because of their gender. In a certain chapter of the book, Dexter attempts to flirt with Meridian sexually. "Dexter had been after Meridian since she was twelve years old," the novelist says. He offered her chocolates as a quick taste test. When she was around fifteen years old, he would take out his wallet, which was filled with cash, and go.

In a different episode, Dexter escalates his attempts to seduce Meridian, as the circumstances grow direr for Meridian. "Think of how it would feel," he would mutter in her ear while holding her with her back tightly against him and pressing his penis on her hips, as the novelist describes: "he would urge... he would press the bedpost against her" (63). Meridian is nothing more than an object of desire satisfied for Dexter. It illustrates the status of women in society and the ease with which men harass them sexually. In one of the novel's incidents, an office worker seduces a female. The scene depicts the sexual harassment and persecution of women based only on their gender. In the role of the storyteller. After that, he lifted her onto the table. (64). A black man named Tommy Odds rapes a white girl named Lynne. This episode also illustrates how depressed women are in a society where men predominate.

In the book, Truman and Meridian are seen as lovers. They both participate in one other's lives as civil rights advocates. They both find each other attractive. It is evident from Walker's portrayal of the sexual sessions between Meridian and Truman that Meridian is at least somewhat pleased with Truman's affection. Truman Hill is the company that Meridian, a woman who was uninterested in making love to her husband Eddie, appreciates. A strange sensation washed over her. It felt like the core of her being was slowly melting. She quitted her mind, and her body felt more grounded and relaxed. However, this inner peace wasn't enough. A deeper sense of fulfillment remained elusive for Meridian. She has "purged" her affection for women. It was not sexual. In the novel she is married and a mother of two children. At such stage of her life she felt love for Truman. But her love for Truman is completely different than that of Sula's love for Ajax and Jude. Morrison's Sula is defiant in nature. She gives full exposure to her sexuality. She does not believe in marriage and mothering and shattered the idea of motherhood saying her grandmother, Eva: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). But Walker's Meridian is a married woman. It is only after marriage that she understands the dark side of it which simply dooms women's freedom. So she takes a decision to leave her husband as well as a child.

She participates in the Civil Rights movement in order to move ahead as well as to achieve new parameters in her life. The most notable difference in Morrison's Sula and Walker's Meridian is, Sula is unable to come out from the circle of sexuality that she has woven around her. She simply fulfils her sexual desire by sleeping with different men. However, Meridian, being married and a mother of two children fulfils her sexual desire with having affair with Truman at the same time never forgets her social responsibility. She, being an active participant of the Civil Rights movement wants to dedicate her life for the noble cause. Meridian is actually seen disinterested in sex before meeting Truman. As the narrator writes for her it seemed: "doubly unfair that after all her sexual experience and after one baby and one abortion she had not once been completely fulfilled by sex" (115). Walker's Meridian is completely different from Morrison's females like Pauline, Sula, Hannah, Eva and Nel who need the company of men. Meridian has given the new dimension to her sexuality. At last when Truman again proposes her she simply rejects his proposal. As Aziz Mohammadi and Kohzadi assert, "Meridian's 'pilgrimage' cannot be complete until she transcends sexual, maternal, and racial categories through her participation in the revolution and her commitment to 'recreate' the world where black children may thrive without thorns of guilt" (2082). Nel, being faithful to her husband Jude gets nothing but betrayal and Sula too is trapped in the treachery of Ajax's sexual lust. It is true that Pauline and Sula try their level best to survive in the male patriarchy. But at last Morrison's women are seen helpless and indulged in fulfilling their sexual instincts with men. However, Walker's Meridian is more creative than Morrison's females. She does not need men for her survival. She even rejects Truman's proposal. Alma S. Freeman observes this act of Meridian and says that she has to reject Truman "in an effort to get a hold of her own life" (39).

Pecola of *The Bluest Eye* and Wile Child of Meridian live on the fringes of the society. Pecola who is raped by her father Cholly becomes mad at last and dies a miserable death. Wile Child too, an adolescent girl like Pecola, is pregnant by unknown father. There are rumours about her in the town. As the narrator says, "It was four or five winters after they first spotted her that the neighbours noticed Wile Chile was pregnant. They were critical of the anonymous 'low down dirty dog' who had done the pronating, but could not imagine what to do... the day Meridian saw Wild Child she withdrew to her room in the honours house for a long time. When the other students looked into her room, they were surprised to see her lying like a corpse on the floor beside her bed, eyes closed and hands limp at her sides. While deceiving there she did not respond to anything; not the call to lunch, not the phone, nothing (24). The lines show the vulnerable condition of a black girl child in the society. The girl child who does not have anyone to take care. Though it was noticed by some people about her pregnancy nobody takes care about her as well as about her child.

Thus, Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* and Sula and Alice Walker in *Meridian* both successfully portrayed the sexuality of women. They reveal how with love and tenderness women can feel the essence of sexual pleasure but on the contrary in the absence of it they become sexual objects to suffer under the load of male's libidinous behaviour from which there is no escape for them.

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