

A New Historicist Study on the —African Military Images in Sula

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Abstract: Toni Morrison was the first African American writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. In her writing, she focused on the blood and tears of African American survival, struggle, and development, selecting fragmented history for novelization, exploring the trauma of marginalized African American groups, and actively participating in historical reshaping. Her works showed a strong new historicism.

The background of *Sula* was set in the period from post-World War I to the African American civil rights movement and the second wave of women's liberation movement in the United States. The book depicted the lives of the "Bottom" people in the African American community who suffered from racial and gender discrimination. This article studied the image of African American soldiers in the book from the perspective of new historicism, revealing their awkward and tragic living conditions after fighting for the country and integrating into the white mainstream society. It pointed out that Morrison's creative concept of writing "little people" actively participating in the reshaping of marginalized group history and dissolving center ideology.

Keywords: Toni Morrison; *Sula*; New Historicism; African military images

1. Introduction

Sula^[1] was set in the United States between 1919 and 1965, telling the stories of people in African American community "Bottom". Currently, domestic and foreign research on *Sula* mainly focuses on the following aspects: The first one is the narrative analysis from the perspective of structure and theme. The Second is exploring the colonial trauma and cultural identity of the African American community from the perspective of African American culture. The third is feminist criticism focusing on the realistic and vivid female characters in the book. However, male characters in the book receive less attention as narrative supporting roles, and existing research literature is relatively limited. Very few of studies on male roles mainly focus on the interpretation and construction of the images of African American men. The special group of African American soldiers has not entered the critical vision of new historicism.

On the whole, African American writer Toni Morrison had a strong sense of history, and her views were quite consistent with many views of new historicism. For example, when asked about her creative ideas, she believed that "discovering and affirming the truth of the experiences of African Americans in the United States was the top priority for African American writers"^[2], and hoped that black history could be reinterpreted and demonstrated how "little people" lived and viewed this history. She consciously linked novel creation with the mission of national liberation, often using real historical events as prototypes or backgrounds to reveal the difficult situation of African Americans. While "reproducing" history, she deconstructed history at the same time, dismantling racism and patriarchal mainstream culture from the standpoint of marginal discourse. Her criticism and condemnation were accompanied by a concern for the fate of the Afro-descendant community and of humanity.

This paper will interpret the African-American military images in *Sula* from the perspective of new historicism, focusing on "nobodies" and "fragmented history". The aim is to uncover the real picture of American history and African-American soldiers' lives, to explore how historical factors are involved in the creation and construction of this book, the ways in which Morrison challenges and critiques the central discourse, and the author's expectations for the cultural reconstruction and self-confidence of the African-American community after the critique.

2. The integration of text and history

New Historicism holds that texts and historical contexts are mutually shaping, and all people are in the discourse system of customs, habits, and traditions. The interaction between writers and historical events constitutes a complete and complex process of self-shaping.