

An Appeal for Sisterhood: A Comparison of Toni Morrison's *Sula* and
Montserrat Roig's *L'hora violeta*.

M. Àngels Francés

University of Alicante

This essay is based on a comparative approach to two novels selected from Toni Morrison and Montserrat Roig's literary careers, *Sula* (1973) and *L'hora violeta* (1980) [*The Violet Hour*], respectively. I consider this parallel analysis to be both important and suggestive due to much evidence of common interests and themes in their work, despite the racial, cultural and historical differences between the societies where Roig (a Catalan writer born under the Francoist regime, after the Spanish Civil War) and Morrison (an Afro-American writer and winner of the 1993 Nobel prize for literature) wrote their texts. It is not my aim to obviate these contextual disparities, the study of which would exceed the length of this essay, but to centre my work on both writers' similar treatment of certain issues concerning the relationship between women.

Morrison and Roig's fictional narratives constitute a continuum of outstanding structural and thematic coherence, based on their perception of female psychological patterns strongly related to their cultural identity. They focus insistently on the quest for self-acceptance and fulfilment, often looking back to the origins and the maternal legacy as a source for self-creation and identification. An examination of the friendships between women, their mechanisms of alliance in the quotidian struggle of growing up black and female, through Morrison's gaze, or Catalan and female, from Roig's perspective, is particularly rewarding.

The friendship between women: a comparison between *Sula* and *L'hora violeta*

Speaking in very general terms, *Sula* and *L'hora violeta* share enough outstanding features to wonder if Montserrat Roig read Toni Morrison and found in her *Sula* a vision of life similar to that of her own. Morrison's novel explores the impact of the community on the individual's quest for self, the rebellion against a legacy of submission and immobility through the depiction of its main character, 'a prophet of change'.¹ These thematic issues are also adequate to describe Roig's novel, as it will be shown later.

Set in a Midwestern black community called The Bottom, *Sula* is centred on a matriarchal line of three generations of women and the story of the relationship between the two main female characters, Sula and Nel, from their childhood to their divergent choices as adults. It defies racial stereotypes and follows an exciting, wild and dangerous character like Sula who, in her search for experience and total freedom, becomes the embodiment of both the potential of black womanhood and also its antithesis, the target of every hatred, the outrageous scapegoat of her community. Nel, in contrast, renounces her secret dreams of flying away from her birthplace for a conventional role as a wife and a mother, and becomes a balanced pillar of her community.

The tension and the love between such opposing characters as Sula and Nel operate as a challenge and a driving force for the whole novel. In fact, *Sula* shows its central character's failure in the creation of herself but it is also an invitation to the (female) reader, a challenge for her to engage with the notion of sisterhood and alliance among black women as a device for the day-to-day struggle to gain a dignified

community life, based on individual freedom founded in physical and spiritual dimensions.

While Morrison's vision deals with a set of characters throughout a lifetime, Roig's fiction has a more generational structure and develops around the axis of the Miralpeix and Ventura-Claret matriarchal families, ruled by women in search of their own Catalan and female identity - some energetic and vital, others victimised and conformist. *L'hora violeta* (1980) is one of her most ambitious novels. It has often been regarded as a pretext to give a voice to her own theoretical vision of feminism and friendship between women.

Structurally complex, *L'hora violeta* contains five parts. Five years after her return home, Natàlia, an independent photographer in her thirties, asks her friend Norma to write about her parents' love and the special relationship between her mother, Judit, and her friend Kati during the Spanish Civil War. The first part consists of a letter in which Natàlia entrusts to Norma some notes about her Aunt Patrícia, Kati's letters to Judit and the latter's incomplete diary. The second part is the story of a triangle involving Natàlia, her lover Jordi and his wife Agnès. The third part is entitled 'La novel·la de l' hora violeta', and explains Judit and Kati's story; the fourth relates another conflicting love triangle whose centre is Norma, and the last part is a kind of epilogue based upon a personal reading of the *Odyssey* in which Natàlia's lover returns to his wife.

The novel challenges the conventions of the realist novel by means of repetition, circularity and fragmentation.² Such textual strategies reflect the ways in which three

women, Natàlia, Norma and Agnès, face their personal failure, their collapse in front of a trilogy of male figures: the father, the intellectual and the romantic ideal. These three women are surely one and the same, a sort of tripartite collective female protagonist despite their rich, diverse personalities. This ‘community of differing females’³ is, then, portrayed through Roig’s deep psychological insight into the Catalan women’s experience in a time of transition and uncertainty marked by bitterness, continued agony and the assimilation of history and the past as important in understanding and accepting the present. The three of them become aware - whether rationally or emotionally - that they must watch the world with no other filter than their own gaze. The novel is the mirror of a generation that does not find its place in the present because it does not entirely assume or overtake the past. But it is also the announcement of a new age: the violet one, the women’s era.

Although the connections between the central characters and the thematic issues of the two novels have been shown to be multiple, I am going to concentrate on some key points that define the women as concrete individuals. The special boundaries between female characters form the very thematic basis of *Sula*⁴ and *L’hora violeta*.⁵ This is implicitly assumed in the first and explicitly presented as the reason for the second:

One day, my friend Natàlia gave me some notes she had written about her aunt, Patrícia Miralpeix, as well as some of Kati’s letters and the diary of Judit Fléchier, her mother. [...] [Natàlia asked me:] I would like you to write something about mum and Kati. In the same way you would do about you and me.⁶

So here we have three models of friendship among women to consider: on the one hand, the couple formed by Morrison's Sula and Nel; on the other hand, Roig's Natàlia-Norma and Judit-Kati relationships, deliberately presented as parallel from the very beginning of the novel. The tensions of the opposite, the deep love that grows and bonds such distant and extremely different female prototypes are the dynamic centre of gravity in both novels.

Sula is a woman of great strength. She defies the conventional restrictive moral of her community and dares to leave it, in search of a mature, individual self: 'I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself.'⁷ She longs for total freedom to live vitally, gratifying and observing her own impulses. Her *otherness* offends people in the town:

Sula was distinctly different. Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, 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.⁸

Sula's roaming in the noisy, disordered, exciting American cities means not only a physical travelling through space but also an interior process of self-discovery.⁹ When she returns, her potential narcissism, her difference has become real. This is visually evident from the very moment she reaches the town, before she speaks a word, in her way of dressing, which establishes a considerable distance between her and the women in the Bottom:

She was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone would ever see. A black crepe dress splashed with pink and yellow zinnias, foxtails, a black felt hat with the veil of net lowered over one eye. [...] No one had seen anything like it ever before, including the mayor's wife and the music teacher, both of whom had been to Rome.¹⁰

Roig's Kati resembles this kind of unstable, dominating character. She is compared to a spider; her orgiastic parties are a motive for gossip among Barcelona female circles: 'She wanted to conquer the whole world, be everywhere, know everything, meet everybody and be madly loved'.¹¹ They despise her but are also secretly jealous of her self-indulgent freedom:

The women from Núria's café belonged to another world, made of decency and quietness. However, deep down inside, we were green with envy. Kati just did what she wanted, during the war too, the most optimistic of us all, certain that, if the Republicans won, women would live in another way.¹²

She is also concerned with fashion and European trends and tendencies:

Kati was the Catalan Coco Chanel. Every week she swallowed the magazines that came from Paris. If Coco said, off with the corsets!, she cast everything off. She only wore a bra, but it was so tiny that could hardly be seen.¹³

Kati initiates a feverish activity in Barcelona during the war, taking care of orphans coming from the ruined North of the country. She implicates Judith in her own idealistic contributions to the new Spain she dreams of, and in doing so she meets Patrick, an Irish volunteer that fighting beside the Republican army. He is married; she often perceives a gleam of absence and sorrow in his eyes. However, they both experience an intense relationship based on their shared Marxist utopia. She does not think of leaving until the defeat of the Republican army ends her last hopes of a dignified future for women in Spain, but her project of a journey into freedom fails because of the fatal blow of her lover's death, in one of the last battles near the Ebro. She commits suicide because no future is left for her: she cannot live without an ideal. Later on, Natàlia, Judit's daughter, is explicitly identified with Kati: 'She has her father's energy, the old Miralpeix, and Kati's restlessness too, although they had no kinship. I don't know..., it seems that Natàlia took away a great part of Kati's soul.'¹⁴ This subtle insinuation of a spiritual bond between Kati, Judit's closest friend, and Natàlia, Judit's daughter, provides us with a hint of the kind of indissoluble oneness that Kati and Judit reach during their relationship, to such an extent that Judit's child inherits Kati's personality, suggesting a sort of shared motherhood. It is Natàlia, significantly, the daring and courageous one who carries out Kati's dream, defying paternal authority, leaving Barcelona to find herself and returning some years after to re-encounter her cultural roots there.

In Morrison's text, Nel acts throughout as a revealing contrast with Sula. Her alienation and quiet submission is a consequence of her maternally oppressive environment:

Except for an occasional leadership role with Sula, she had no aggression. 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.¹⁵

In the same way Roig's Judit is the calm, even-tempered one for the restless, lively Kati:

They were the two poles, the positive and the negative one. Kati was active and nervous, she never stood still. Judit was slow and solitary, she didn't like people. And, despite this, they got on very well together. [...] Afterwards, they sat in my garden, under the lemon tree, and chatted until it got dark and Barcelona had that colour of death and waiting.¹⁶

But despite their evident differences in character, both pairs of friends act as a complementary twin to the other. Their mutual appeal reaches, sometimes, slightly erotic connotations, those revealed after the discovery of the beauty of the other's body (so *like* one's own). These become an external mirror of the equally beautiful innermost thoughts:

That may be the first time Kati and Judit met with no others present. Kati watched Judit, her plum-coloured cheeks were even paler today. The ray of sunlight had shifted and they were nearly talking in the shadows. Kati noticed

they were speaking like they had never done before. She gazed at Judit and thought she liked her face, she had a feverish glance, strange though intense.¹⁷

Kati had never noticed Judit's charm before. It is now, in this twilight darkened by the fear of war, this evening of their first close and confidential conversation, that they discover each other. The portrayal of Judit is that of a unique, exceptional woman, whom Kati perceives as being so different from the rest once she gets to know her enigmatic, emerald gaze. Their appeal creates an adult, intellectual bond between them, so different in its beginnings from that between Sula and Nel, who meet in childhood, but so alike when they meet again after a gap of ten years. The multiple similarities between their relationships are a symptom of the intense, somewhat childish and tender feelings that Kati and Judit show for each other.

Sula and Nel also signify for each other the realisation of the ideal partner only imagined in their most secret dreams. When Nel and Sula are twelve, their meeting had something of magic and destiny: 'For it was in dreams that the two girls had first met. [...] They had already made each other's acquaintance in the delirium of their noon dreams.'¹⁸ Both grow up together and reach the same kind of closeness as Judit and Kati, but with the additional sensuality of their adolescent complicity:

They ran in the sunlight, creating their own breeze, which pressed their dresses into their damp skin. Reaching a kind of square of four leaf-locked trees which promised cooling, they flung themselves into the four-cornered shade to taste their lip sweat and contemplate the wildness that had come upon them suddenly.

They lay in the grass, their foreheads almost touching, their bodies stretched away from each other at a 180-degree angle.¹⁹

The passage is burning with lively sensuality. Sula and Nel are twelve, and both awoken to an amazing range of senses and feelings they had never known before: the voluptuous pleasure of their own young bodies and the discovery of men, those who wear 'the cream colored trousers marking with a mere seam the place where the mystery curled'.²⁰ They feel invited, beckoned to those smooth vanilla crotches. Any sexual desire, in this passage and within the novel as a whole, is undoubtedly oriented towards men, whose love is the axis around which Sula's family develop: 'It was manlove that Eva bequeathed to her daughters. [...] The Peace women simply loved maleness, for its own sake.'²¹ Nel and Sula's is a shared development of eroticism, the kind of adolescent bond that some theorists of lesbian literary criticism have reclaimed as lesbian.²²

The importance of this passage, I think, does not lie in a kind of (lesbian) sexual revelation but in its crucial structural location. It provides a kind of climax that precedes, eloquently, the accidental death of Little Chicken, a child who, playing with Sula, is accidentally thrown into the water and finally dies. The tragedy, then, breaks out after a strange moment of totality, of supreme closeness between both characters, when the natural elements provide a kind of break from reality. This spiritual union between Sula and Nel, followed by an innocent death, seems to predetermine a fatal destiny, marked by a terrible secret that will burden both twelve year old girls from now on.

The intimacy established between both pairs (Nel and Sula, Judit and Kati) is such that half their souls die the moment they part. Although their separation is caused by different reasons (Sula's betrayal by Jude, on one hand, and Kati's suicide because of her lover's death and the fascist victory in Spain, on the other), the mourning and painful loneliness that follow the departure of the loving friend is overwhelming for those who remain. Judit almost interprets reality from Kati's thoughts and parameters, as long as she is afraid to live without her:

To me, it [the rain] brings me memories, as if Kati's soul whispered in my ear, the sound of rain tells me, I shall come back, Judit, don't you cry for me, cry for you, you've been left so lonely... Oh dear!, now I'm not afraid of death, but of the rest of my life.²³

Even her daughter can see it clearly: 'The love of Kati and mum was intense because they wanted it eternal. They thought it would never end, despite such a dirty war.'²⁴ Judit eventually becomes a kind of vegetative being after Kati's death, because of a fatal apoplexy with a clear symbolic dimension: 'And, when their relationship broke up because of Kati's death, Judit lost a great bit of herself.'²⁵

Sula's departure after Nel's agreement to a conventional marriage is not a traumatic one, although her return brings a metaphorical springtime to Nel's life. Despite their years of distance and their opposing paths, Nel and Sula's relationship retains its primacy for each of them.²⁶ Even after their last painful meeting, which does not bring reconciliation, Sula remembers 'the days when we were two throats and one eye and we had no price'.²⁷ And Nel is finally able to identify the source of the grief

that has undermined her after her husband's departure; the loss she actually suffered was not him but Sula. The real reason for her sadness, then, is Sula's absence:

'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.' It was a fine cry —loud and long— but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.²⁸

In similar terms, Roig ends the central part of her novel with Judit's aching voice, which revives and invents Kati's. In a bitter sorrow which seems to reach a powerless madness, Judit dedicates the last words of her diary to her dearest friend's memory:

Sometimes I feel her soul hanging around and saying, I shall come back, Judit, I shall come back, and there will be nothing to keep us apart. [...] Fill your home with my ghost, Judit, fill it with my memory. My voice will tear the dreariness of the dusk in Barcelona, don't let me out of you, Judit, love of my life, love of my death. I feel all this and I don't know whether I am making her up, Kati... But I know nobody will kill this memory, and that I will always take it with me.²⁹

I would not like to end this article without referring to the amazingly similar portrayal of the love triangle that undermines two of the central female characters in *L'hora violeta* and *Sula*, and leaves unanswered a threatening question about what to do

when passion, the desperate necessity of love (or just sex) cuts the bonds of sisterhood among women and destroys their search for independence.

A dark premonition of betrayal is recalled the first time the name of Jude, as in the biblical character Judas who betrays Jesus for a handful of money, is pronounced in *Sula*. His reasons for marrying Nel are loveless and selfish; he is just searching for ‘a someone sweet, industrious and loyal to shore him up’,³⁰ someone to care about his hurt, the half he needs to make one unique and great Jude. In Nel’s case, it is the feeling of being needed that flatters her. She consciously accepts the role of submissive housewife she is being offered, she expects nothing from him but the intimate knowledge of a partner, someone to know her deep inside, the loved one whose gaze would give her the identity, the real existence she is looking for. No passion stirs her, no love overwhelms her quiet days, but it is because of the sense of loss after Jude’s departure, the certainty she is not necessary for him anymore (or for Sula, either) that her days become a living hell. Even in her desperate efforts to cry, to find a relief for her stinging pain, she finds herself recalling Sula, the very reason why she has been left alone: ‘That was too much. To lose Jude and not have Sula to talk about it because it was Sula that he had left her for.’³¹

She has followed the community rules, her mother’s example, and now, like her, she is ‘turning to custard’ under the hateful look of her husband. A previous scene of the novel seems to be recalled: that in which Nel and her mother travel by train and make a mistake when entering a coach peopled by white men and women. A white conductor treats them in a humiliating way and Helene, Nel’s mother, smiles coquettishly to him in return. Two black soldiers watching the scene literally bubble in hatred for her servile

smile. The contempt of those soldiers for her mother's foolish attitude is now in Jude's eyes, because there is no trace of dignity in Nel's incredulous, frozen smile.

Similarly, Jordi deserts the sweet, calm Agnès because of the independent, modern Natàlia. Their marriage was, again, based upon a violent need of dependence. When he told her about love, the only thing she could think of was 'don't ever leave me, don't ever leave me',³² while she furiously sucked his penis in a desperate attempt to own him forever.

Agnès is the daughter of a woman abandoned by her husband; a woman who dragged herself crying and shouting to prevent him from leaving. Agnès has her mother's shameful humbling recorded in her brain like a painful memory. In Jordi's love she finds the only way to erase it. She happily accepts reproducing the conventional role that everyone expects from her: he, the Marxist activist who devotes his life to the cause; she, the loving wife who will sacrifice her studies for him, to be his shelter, the silent one he can speak to about his dreams, his projects as a great writer and politician. In exchange, she would have his presence beside her in bed:

They met at night, exhausted from so much work. They hardly talked, but those moments when they asked each other, what have you done today?, made her feel happy. [...] Agnès knew that Jordi was often not listening to her, he was half-lost and sleepy and his thoughts were far away. But he was beside her. And in bed, as well.³³

So both Nel and Agnès are left alone with their sorrow, a hopeless future and two little children to feed and bring up. The weight of their pain is such that it becomes a kind of material presence. For Nel, the oldest cry she is not able to exhale becomes 'just a flake of something dry and nasty in her throat',³⁴ which later grows like a 'grey ball, the little ball of fur and string and hair always floating in the light near her'.³⁵ Similarly, Agnès 'woke up with a dry, hairy mouth, dirty with a grey dust',³⁶ like when she was pregnant, when the life she was feeding inside was a terrifying 'viscous and hairy ball that moved up to her throat'.³⁷ A threatening presence in the air, an awful sticky mess in their throats are the identical symbols for their grief, which is not described in terms of rivers of tears but as the domestic, maddening horror of the daily struggle to survive. As Montserrat Roig suggests, theirs is Penelope's archetypal role, as they remain at home waiting for the return of their husbands or just watching the days go by.

However, unlike Nel, Agnès has the chance to say the last word. Her voice is the one that brings Roig's novel to an end. The modern Ulysses represented by Jordi finally returns home, but his patient Penelope has finally found the strength to say 'no'.³⁸ Her choice is the only real bid for independence that is likely to succeed, because those who reject the role of a woman as passive victim and submissive wife,³⁹ like Natàlia and Sula, nevertheless fall in love with men who finally either return to their wives (in Natàlia's case) or run away to avoid commitment (as with Sula's relationship with Ajax). They are left to assume the role of the woman who waits, in a kind of perverse inversion of roles. All in all, no matter how sexually liberated⁴⁰ they feel, how independent they believe they are, they still have an urgent need for a lasting love to achieve their wholeness. Although the bonds of sisterhood between women are

somehow presented as a valid alternative for male love, in this blind and passionate search for an ultimate sexual and emotional fulfilment they carelessly forget any loyalty, break every rule and betray other women. As Catherine G. Bellverhas found in Roig's novel, there is a premise that intense and lasting personal attachment is the key to woman's sense of wholeness and at the same time to her destruction.⁴¹ Feminist ideals do not seem to provide a solution that reconciles the affective needs of these female characters with their search for identity and freedom; in the impossibility of reaching a balance between both, lies a final vital void.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown how some of the special historical and cultural circumstances that affect Roig and Morrison's fictional narratives are both strongly determined by a double reason for oppression: their cultural difference and their female condition, in a world against which they both react with an energetic defence of their feminine integrity and genuine rootedness. Although the distance between both worlds (Roig's and Morrison's) is, obviously, too wide to establish a kind of common ground of analysis, I have found several thematic connections between their visions of a certain kind of female prototypes. They coincide in the depiction of a non-sexual female loving relationship: we follow the story of bold and wild female characters, Sula and Kati, who dare to defy society's restrictive traditions in order to recreate themselves freely. They both, however, end up dying a lonely and desperate death. In contrast, the ones who are willing to follow the rules and become a part of the central stabilising force in their communities, Nel and Judit, stay alive. However, this survival is not easy; Nel is finally able to reformulate her life as a lonely and monotonous one, while Judit lives in a permanent void of consciousness and feelings, very close to real death.

The tension between opposite female typologies, therefore, is the basis that enhances Roig and Morrison's literary achievements, and the different consequences of their heroines' choices create a moving portrayal of women tied by a common existential bond of a conflicting but still necessary sisterhood.

¹ Susan Willis, 'Black Women Writers: Taking a Critical Perspective', in *Making Difference. Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by G. Greene and C. Kahn (London & New York, Routledge, 1985), pp.211-237 (p.213).

² Catherine Davies, *Contemporary Feminist Fiction in Spain: The Work of Montserrat Roig and Rosa Montero* (Oxford & Providence, Berg, 1994), p.53.

³ Catherine G. Bellver, 'Montserrat Roig and the Creation of a Gynocentric Reality', in *Women Writers of Contemporary Spain. Exiles in the Homeland*, ed. by J. L. Brown (London, Associated University Presses Inc., 1991), pp.217-239.

⁴ Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York, Plume, 1973).

⁵ Montserrat Roig, *L'hora violeta* (Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1980). All translations are my own; I will refer to the original Catalan within these notes.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.11: 'Un dia, la meva amiga Natàlia em va donar algunes notes que havia escrit sobre la seva tia, la Patrícia Miralpeix, i també algunes cartes de la Kati i el dietari de la Judit Fléchier, la seva mare. [...] M'agradaria [Natalia em demanà] que escrivissis

alguna cosa sobre la mamà i la Kati. De la mateixa manera que ho faries sobre tu i sobre mi’.

⁷ Morrison, p.92.

⁸ Ibid., p.118.

⁹ The notion of travelling as a symbol of the unfolding of history and the development of the individual’s consciousness with regard to the past is known and explored in literary works around the world. Susan Willis comments on the importance of the journey with regards to black women’s literature, and Àlex Broch observes a similar motif in Catalan literature of the seventies as ‘el mite del nord enllà’. Willis, ‘Black Women Writers’, p.220; Àlex Broch, *Literatura catalana dels anys vuitanta* (Barcelona, Ed. 62, 1991).

¹⁰ Morrison, p.90.

¹¹ Roig, p.120: ‘Volia conquerir el món, ser a tot arreu, saber-ho tot, conèixer tothom i, a més, ser bojament estimada’.

¹² Ibid., p.122: ‘Les dones del Núria pertanyíem a un altre món, fet de decència i tranquil·litat. Però, en el fons del fons, ens hi moríem d’enveja. La Kati feia el que volia, i també ho va fer durant la guerra, la més optimista de totes, segura que, si guanyaven els rojos, les dones viuríem d’una altra manera’.

¹³ Ibid., p.127: ‘La Kati era la Coco Chanel catalana. Cada setmana s’empassava les revistes que li arribaven de París. En retallava els models. Si la Coco deia, fora cotilles!, ella s’ho treia tot. Només duia sostenidors i, tan remenuts, que a penes es veien’.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.117: ‘Té l’energia del meu pare, el vell Miralpeix, i també el bellugeig de la Kati, i això que no tenen cap parentiu. No ho sé..., sembla com si la Natalia s’hagués endut un bon tros de l’ànima de Kati’.

¹⁵ Morrison, p.83.

¹⁶ Roig, p.117: ‘Eren els dos pols, l’un positiu i l’altre negatiu. La Kati era activa i nerviosa, mai no s’estava quieta. La Judit era lenta i solitària, no li agradava la gent. I tot i això, s’avenien molt. [...] Després, seien al jardí de casa, sota el llimoner, i enraonaven fins que s’enfosquia i Barcelona prenia aquell to de mort i espera’.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.129-130: ‘Potser era la primera vegada que la Kati i la Judit es trobaven sense ningú al davant. La Kati mirà la Judit, les galtes color de pruna avui encara eren més pàl·lides. El raig de sol s’havia desplaçat i gairebé parlaven entre penombres. [...] La Kati s’adonà que parlaven com mai no ho havien fet. Mirà la Judit i pensà que li agradava el seu rostre, tenia una mirada febrosa, estranya però intensa’.

¹⁸ Morrison, p.51.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.58.

²⁰ Ibid., p.51.

²¹ Ibid., p.41.

²² Lynne Pearce, 'Lesbian Criticism', in *Feminist Readings, Feminists Reading*, ed. by Sarah Mills and Lynne Pearce (London, Prentice Hall Europe, 1996), pp.225-256 (p.231). In her article entitled 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism', in *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New York, Pantheon, 1985), pp.180-181, Barbara Smith concludes that *Sula* is 'an exceedingly lesbian novel in the emotions expressed, in the definition of female character, and in the way the politics of heterosexuality are portrayed'. Smith bases this claim on the grounds of the radical and subversive message of the novel, of the *sameness* and the *sisterhood* which unite Nel and Sula. Although Morrison's challenge to a male-centred society is certainly provocative, especially regarding Sula's rebellious and suggestive character, I do not quite believe that Sula's hypothetical lesbian sexuality is the cause for her radical behaviour. I agree with Susan Willis that Sula is 'an extremely political figure whose passionate articulation of contradiction casts a critical perspective upon all forms of domination.' Willis, 'Black Women Writers', p. 214. It is important to notice that *L'hora violeta* and other novels published in Spain after the Civil War, such as Carmen Laforet's *Nada* (1944), which display intense relationships among women, were also considered lesbian by certain contemporary critical approaches.

²³ Roig, p.109: 'A mi [la pluja] em porta records, com si l'ànima de la Kati em parlés a cau d'orella, el soroll de la pluja em diu, tornaré, Judit, tornaré, no ploris per mi, plora

per tu, que t'has quedat tan sola... Déu meu!, ara no em fa por la mort, sinó el que em queda de vida'.

²⁴ Ibid., p.18: 'L'amor de la Kati i la mamà va ser intens perquè el volgueren etern. Van pensar que mai no s'acabaria, malgrat aquella guerra tan bruta'.

²⁵ Ibid., p.15: 'I, quan es trencà la relació per la mort de la Kati, la Judit va perdre un bon tros d'ella mateixa'.

²⁶ Smith, p.179.

²⁷ Morrison, p.147.

²⁸ Ibid., p.174.

²⁹ Roig, p.144: 'De vegades sento la seva ànima que em ronda i em diu, tornaré, Judit, tornaré, i ja no hi haurà res que ens separarà [...]. Omple la casa del meu fantasma, Judit, omple-la del meu record. La meua veu esquinçarà la monotonia dels capvespres de Barcelona, no em treguis de tu, Judit, amor de la meua vida, amor de la meua mort. Sento tot això i ja no sé si me l'invento, la Kati... Però sé que ningú ja no em pot matar aquest record i que sempre el duré amb mi'.

³⁰ Morrison, p.83.

³¹ Ibid., p.110.

³² Roig, p.32: ‘No em deixis mai, no em deixis mai’.

³³ Ibid., pp.54-55: ‘Es trobaven a les nits, rebentats de tanta feina. A penes si enraonaven, però aquells moments en què es preguntaven mútuament, què has fet avui?, li feien sentir-se feliç. [...] Sovint l’Agnès veia que en Jordi no l’escoltava, anava mig perdut de son i se n’anava lluny. Però s’estava al seu costat. I també al llit’.

³⁴ Morrison, p.108.

³⁵ Ibid., p.109.

³⁶ Roig, p.32: ‘Es despertava amb la boca balba, bruta de pols grisa i de pèls’.

³⁷ Ibid., p.40: ‘bola llefiscosa i peluda que pujava cap a la gola’.

³⁸ Ibid., p.232.

³⁹ Catherine G. Bellver notices this in the case of Natàlia and *L’hora violeta*, but it is also perfectly applicable to Sula’s case. See Bellver, p.231.

⁴⁰ With a quite remarkable lack of accuracy, Stephen M. Hart exemplifies Natàlia’s model as a liberated woman with a passage that actually refers to Agnès train of thought. Agnès tries to define herself in opposition to her mother but, in fact, she repeats her role of patient, conventional wife until she finally manages to achieve real independence. See Stephen M. Hart, *White Ink: Essays on Twentieth-century Feminine Fiction in Spain and Latin America* (London, Tamesis Books Limited, 1993), p.114.

⁴¹ Bellver, p.230.