

Feministic perspective of Toni Morrison with special reference to *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

Toni Morrison may be considered as the most formally sophisticated novelist in the history of African-American literature. Her single accomplishment as a writer is that she managed, uncannily, to invent her own mode of literary representation. Her themes are often those expected of naturalist fiction- the burdens of history, the determining social effects of race, gender, or class- but they are also the great themes of lyrical modernism: love, death, betrayal, and the burden of the individual's responsibility of her/his own fate. The paper attempts to show how discrimination plays a major role in distorting and destroying the peaceful and happy life of individual in the novel, *The Bluest Eye* Toni Morrison through the characters Pecola, Jane, Pauline portrays the evils of sexual discrimination.

Keywords: Sexual discrimination, Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

1. Introduction

The events in *The Bluest Eye* are seen from the point of view of Claudia Mac Teer. As the novel begins, Claudia is looking back at the year when she was nine and when her friend Pecola Breedlove, then eleven, became pregnant, having been raped by her own father, Cholly Breedlove. In the summer of 1941, Claudia and her sister, Frieda, planted marigold seeds in the childish belief that if the marigolds survived, so would Pecola's baby. Even as the novel opens, however, the reader knows that the seeds never germinated and that the baby died. Years later, it is still impossible for Claudia to explain why the events of that year happened, so the novel becomes instead her account of how they happened.

The *Bluest Eye* has two structuring devices. One is the four seasons, which provide the four major divisions of the book. Claudia begins her account with the fall of 1940, when Pecola is placed temporarily in the Mac Teer home because her father has tried to burn down the storefront apartment that serves as Breedlove's home. In the spring, Pecola is raped by her father, and by summer, her increasingly obvious pregnancy is the subject of gossip all over the town. Pecola herself has retreated into madness, and kept company in the fantasy world of her own mind with an imaginary friend.

The other device giving structure to the novel is a passage that imitates the Dick-and-Jane readers, once so popular in elementary schools. The picture that the passage presents of the perfect white family – Mother and Father, Dick and Jane – contrasts sharply with the world of the Breedloves and the Mac Teers, the world of poor blacks.

To show the contrast, Morrison repeats the passage three times: first, as it would normally appear on the printed page; then, with all punctuation removed; and finally, with even the spaces between words removed. The Dick-and-Jane story degenerates on the page into a jumble of letters; lines from the storybook-perfect account of its characters' lives are interspersed throughout the Breedloves' story to emphasize the contrasting ugliness and disorder of theirs. A few run-together sentences describe Dick and Jane's pretty house.

The Breedloves' home is a converted store with beaverboard panels providing the only inner walls. The mother from the world of Dick and Jane is laughing and playful. Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove, has seen all of her dreams fade into nothingness. She finds escape from the ugliness of the storefront and her life there as a maid in a white family's home as clean and orderly as the world in which Dick and Jane lives. Her own family is an intrusion into that orderly world, and she returns from that world each day to fight with her husband and to beat her children into respectability.

The father, too, unlike the smiling father of Dick and Jane, has seen his dreams shattered and has suffered the humiliation associated with growing up black in a white-dominated world. He has responded to the ill treatment has received with violence. Ironically, even the love that he wants to express to his daughter takes a violent form when he returns home drunk one afternoon and rapes her.

Early in the novel, Pecola lies in bed listening to her parents going through the mechanical but painful ritual of their fights. She longs to make herself disappear, and in her mind she does make her eyes go away. Eyes become the centre of Pecola's life and of her constant search for love. She believes that if only she had beautiful blue eyes, the world would look prettier- that even her parents would be hesitant to fight in front of such pretty blue eyes.

After the rape and the resulting pregnancy and suspension from school, Pecola goes to Lorain's "spiritual and psychic Reader", Soaphead Church, to ask him to give her blue eyes. Fraud that he is, he in a sense grants her wish. Soaphead knows that from that day on, Pecola will have blue eyes, but only in her own mind. Before she leaves the house, Soaphead uses Pecola to rid himself of a nuisance: a mangy old dog that spends its days on his doorstep.

He gives Pecola poisoned meat to feed the dog, telling her that the dog's response will be the sign to her whether she will get her wish. Pecola watches in horror as the dog stumbles around the yard and dies. This episode, combined with the earlier rape as well as a second assault on her by her father, drives Pecola over the edge into insanity. In her madness, Pecola does have

blue eyes, although no one sees them except for her and the imaginary friend that she invents to reassure her constantly that her eyes are indeed the bluest in the world.

The novel opens with three versions of the 'Dick and Jane' reader, so prevalent in the public schools during the 1940s, which also is the time in which the novel is set. The ironic duality of home and school experiences is brought out through the ingenious structure of the novel. The Dick-Jane world is an ideal middle-class, secure, suburban white atmosphere, where the mother is a housewife and the father easy going.

The novel opens with the description of this typical American family. "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane."

"The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. Father, smile. See the Dog. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play."

We find this description reappear as chapter headings for the story of black lives, all removed in various degrees from the textbook "reality". The first version is rendered in Standard English, correct and white. The second version, while repeating the message exactly, assumes a different visual appearance on the page without proper capitals or punctuation. The third, the wording of which is likewise unaltered, is completely run together, one long collection of consonants and vowels signifying nothing. The jumble of the real world of the blacks is portrayed in the third version.

The three versions are symbolic of the lifestyles that the author explores in the novel either directly or implicitly. The first is clearly a white family, which impinges upon the lives of the blacks and at the same time excludes them. The second is that of Mc Teer family, run by poor but loving parents, who care for their children's welfare despite their poverty. The Breedloves lives like misshapen world, which finally destroys her. The three manifest individually the social concept of the family.

Very early in the novel, Pecola's terribly pathetic desire to be Shirley Temple is demonstrated by her fascination with Frieda's blue-and-white Shirley Temple mug. Shirley Temple becomes a particularly destructive ego, ideal for Pecola who drinks large quantities of milk just to handle the mug with Shirley Temple's face on it. She would gaze fondly into the blue eyes on Shirley Temple's dimpled face.

The child is prepared to go to any lengths to acquire the film stars' blue eyes, which she innocently equates with the happiness, beauty and love that are missing in her own life. Through the Shirley Temple mug the author demonstrates how racial tropes have shaped cultural products that might appear to have nothing to do with race.

Pecola does not have joy and love to balance pain and ugliness of her normal everyday experiences. Growing gradually into puberty is a luxury denied to her. So she retreats into madness, a madness that includes the blue eyes she has prayed for, bestowed upon her by a "magic man", Soaphead Church, a strange outcast of a man suffering from his own delusions.

Through madness, Pecola believes that blue eyes have finally have been granted to her, tries to walk flapping her arms like wings, convinced that she can fly. Secure in her madness, she has no idea that she has become an outsider to the town.

In contrast to Pecola, Maureen Peal is beautiful, light-skinned, long-haired, rich, spoiled and widely adored. The girl induces feelings of inferiority, hatred, envy and incomprehension in other black children, who are at a loss to understand the secret of her popularity: "Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered, the Maureen Peals of the world? What was the secret? What did we lack?"

Embodying the values of the dominant culture as she does, Maureen might simply function as a hate-object. But, the young narrator realises that it is not Maureen who is the problem. And all the time we knew that the Maureen Peal was not the enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The thing to fear was the thing that made her beautiful and not us.

The cult of Shirley Temple, to which the children in *The Bluest Eye* succumb, also originates in the movies: "it was a small step to Shirley Temple. I learned much later to worship her, just as I learned to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement."

Claudia is given a big, blue-eyed baby doll as a Christmas present. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. But not all black little girls were susceptible to such pressures. The strong-willed Claudia, who embodies a different, more compassionate and more critical set of values than many of the adults around her, refuses to love the alien doll which she surreptitiously dismembers, carefully examining its parts out of curiosity to discover what it is that all the world finds lovable. Thus this paper portrayed Feministic perspective of Toni Morrison with special reference to *The Bluest Eye*.

2. References

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