

Problematics of love as EROS in *the bluest eye*

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Abstract

Eros, the source of eros among Mankinds and being the oldest among the Gods, is the originator of greatest benefits or perfection. But as eros and sex are closely intertwined, *The Bluest Eye* having been settled in the period of Great Migration and its ascribed socio-economic adversities, Puritanical framed chastity and western rigid religious discourses which seeing body disassociated from mind and intellect and as a site of unruly passions and carnal desires demands its control and repression, the expression of eros in the characters depicted in the novel hardly find itself able to be inspired with the so called God, Eros. Eros in *The Bluest Eye's* men and women characters is either warped or repressed. Pauline and Cholly are those violent and abusing husband and wife who despite being actively engaged in sexual exchanges refrain to see the love as eros as a highly motivational force of mature and wise lovers and merely make shows of impure and base lovers motivated by Common Aphrodite described by Pausanias in the Platonic *Symposium*. Morrison also shows Pauline and Cholly's movement from South to North in the hope of better economical opportunities as the major cause of mitigating their sexual intimacy.

Keywords: Love, sex, eros, erotic plasticity

1. Introduction

The Bluest Eye beginning with the discussion of non-erotic man-woman relationship foregrounds the problematics which disrupts the possibilities of eros in man-woman relationship. The novel with actions situated in the industrialized and capitalist ethos in Loraine, circumscribed to the first and tiny step of love, remains bleakest in the knowledge and practices of love ethics.

Morrison ironically makes the Breedloves, the central family in the novel since it is a family that in spite of breeding two children fails in breeding love. The Breedloves completely negate any love: familial, friendly or erotic. Morrison's first novel represents how oppression under a racist, capitalist and patriarchal social structure virtually wipes out the erotic reflections from men-women relationships. Calvin remarks on their relationship: "Black men who are themselves victim of oppression [victimize] Black women with what looks like the same oppression" (qtd. in Samuels 27). Though, prior to migrating to the city of Lorain, Cholly and Pauline act as loving and caring couple, in city they find their lives dreadfully verdant with economic and emotional bedlams. Before understanding their excruciating life in city it would be significant to have a brief view of the synchronized commencement of their relationship in village.

Morrison through Pauline underlines how eros erupts as a natural desire during adolescence. Eros in Pauline's life kindles in her the longings for a man: "Fantasies about men and love and touching were drawing her mind and hands away from her work . . . She had only to lay her head on his chest and he would lead her away to the sea, to the city, to the woods . . . forever" (*TBE* 88). This fantasy seems to assume the shape of actuality when Pauline sees Cholly. At the onset, Cholly too seems to have in their erotic union a sense of satisfaction, capable to redeem of his past dehumanization. Eros in Cholly too erupts in his adolescence as a natural phenomenon making him eager for erotic fulfillment with Darlene, a neighborhood girl, but it is turned into the

emasculatation of his manhood when under the gaze of armed white men he is compelled to finish the act. This humiliating experience not only warps his erotic but turns him sexually violent also and he begins to assume sex as a vehement experience something to exert power over powerlessness and male over female: "His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess – that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal . . . For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence" (118). Terry Otten rightly says, "In the story of ironically named Cholly Breedlove, [Morrison] characterizes a quest and capacity for love malformed and wrenched by the viciousness of a white-dominated culture that perverts its very expression" (qtd. in O'Donnell and Peterson 653). Besides, Cholly's upbringing in adverse circumstances also greatly influences if not determines his expression of eros. Abandoned by the mother, rejected by the father and reared by his surrogate mother, Aunt Jimmy, who is intimate but indifferent, leaves him feeling awkward with relationships. Nevertheless it was the appeal for love and enjoyment and her emotional dependence on Pauline that had stirred him to feel at home with her.

Showing the warmth of an ideal lover, Cholly allows Pauline to feel precious and appealing. Cholly's genial touch salves the complexity for her crippled identity: "She was secure and grateful; he was kind and lively. She had not known there was so much laughter in the world" (*TBE* 90). Though racist, the setting of agrarian south offers them the possibilities of harmonious alliance. But their migration to city in the hope of better economic and social conditions disrupts their erotic exchanges with its estrangement, economic challenges and racial humiliation. According to Barbara Christian, up north both of them experience "the loss of center. The marriage becomes shredded with quarrels, as reciprocity is not possible; neither one can experience pleasure in the other as they once did" (qtd. in Samuels 26). Cholly takes to his job and uses alcohol to bring himself some oblivion from his burdensome

life. Pauline too looks for a source of vicarious satisfaction by serving in a white family. Clearly their relationship in urbane set up does not lose a sexual base but those earlier erotic ebbs reappearing only during coitus: “That streak of green from the june-bug light, the purple from the berries trickling along my thighs, Mama’s lemonade yellow runs sweet in me. . . . I feel like I’m laughing between my legs, . . . But I know . . . it lasts and lasts and lasts” (*TBE* 101-2). The passionate lovemaking affords her vision the childhood flecks of color; she expresses its intense pleasure as the “rainbow all inside” (102). But in spite of experiencing as a loving partner Pauline assumes it as the impression of her strength and superiority: “When he does, I feel a power, I be strong, I be pretty, I be young” (101). Though, she weaves an illusion of empowerment experienced by her through erotic fulfillment her eros is not able to liberate her of her oppression. To express her denial to the importance of earlier love, Barbara Christian comments, “Pummed by the complexities of a mean precious nature, [she fears] the funk of love that is necessary for the spirit to grow” (qtd. in Gates and Appiah 64-65). Her discouraging involvement that constantly thrusts Cholly to be the stimulator may also be the cause of wearing down the rainbows of their lives: “And it was Pauline, or rather marrying her, that did for him what the flash light did not do” (*TBE* 126).

Pauline evinces their relationship with the news of her pregnancy: “They eased back into a relationship more like the early days of their marriage” (92). Glad Pauline quits job and retorts to her home keeping but aloofness re-envelops her and to get rid of it she takes the silver screen of the cinematic world, which problematizes their relationship even more. Instead of strengthening eros in Pauline, the mainstream culture, inflicting the myths of beauty and goodness as the twin virtue, damages the possibilities of erotic fulfillment in her life. Unlike the poet Clifton’s erotic celebration of her big hips and nappy hair, we find Pauline convinced of her ugliness and seeking white God for the redemption of herself and her family. Under the influence of religion she sees herself as crucified during her coitus. Morrison exposes the erotic plasticity showing how women’s sexuality is malleable and influenced by socio-cultural factors and religiosity. According to Baumeister and Stillman’s erotic plasticity hypothesis – women having high erotic plasticity are more likely to seek substitutes.

In an interview with Christina Davis, Morrison expresses her preoccupation with men-women relationship: “the relationship of black men and black women and the axes on which those relationships turn and on how they complement each other; fulfilling one another, or hurt one another and are made whole or prevented from wholeness by things that they have incorporated into their psyche” (qtd. in Dharmani 67). Thus internalizing self-hatred Pauline blocks herself of all the possibilities of erotic satisfaction. The more she enjoys the representation of life in the white world the more she ignores the erotic in her life. The white patriarchal conventions of love and romance warp her understanding of eros. The omniscient narrator remarks how she values “love as possessive mating, and romance as the goal of the spirit. It would be for her a well-spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing freedom in every way” (*TBE* 95). Morrison more poignantly portrays the disruption of the erotic, the motif of ‘funk’, which she works out through Geraldine. A

prey of self-denial and lover of white culture Geraldine suffers from erotic plasticity. She exemplifies those kinds of desensitized middle class women who in attempts to conform to the standards of the dominant culture try to get rid of the funkiness of emotions; sexual or erotic. Such is the sterilizing impact of dominant environment that during lovemaking instead of enjoying her orgasm she is worried of the inconvenience it causes to her: “While he moves inside her, . . . She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love . . . When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she . . . pretend she is having an orgasm” (65-66). Thus Morrison shows the impact of white culture on the erotic life of the black women besides showing the displacement and disassociation from ‘nature’ and funkiness as the source of disarray in such characters. Morrison also presents ‘religion’ and the sexual decency demanded of a woman as accountable for the disruption of ‘funk’.

But with eros repressed and suppressed the women find it impossible to break out of the circles of oppression. That is why Audre Lorde celebrated eros as a source of power and essence of human. As such the erotic acquires a spiritual essence, besides ecstatic fulfillment it also offers possibilities of personal emancipation. In the case of Pauline, sexual intercourse evokes the erotic of the past manifested in the mental and natural images. But Pauline’s self-conception of a crucified Jesus during the moments robs the moment of orgasm of its empowering capacities. As a result her life with Cholly becomes embedded with disputes and fights. The fights that the alcoholic, Cholly and perversely self-serving, Pauline arouse are premeditated, uninspired and tedious which shows that perhaps such mayhem is necessary to make their lives livable.

Conclusion: Thus the novel touches the erotic only bleakly and in Platonic impermanent form, as the characters fail to experience its spiritual core. Suffering from erotic plasticity due to socio-economic factors, unyielding orthodox religion, and the superficial charms of suppressive mainstream culture which promises happiness and love to those who meet standards of white beauty while Pauline makes disengaged engagement Cholly handles it quite torturously. Besides, Morrison has also presented the life conditions and economic difficulties of the North as disrupting the erotic intimacy of Pauline and Cholly.

2. References

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