

## Race and racism in the bluest eye: Toni Morrison

<sup>1</sup> V Sangeetha, <sup>2</sup> K Divya Lakshmi

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor in English, Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and Science Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup> Nadar Saraswathi College of Arts and Science, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India

### Abstract

Toni Morrison was an American novelist. Her novel portrays African American people, culture, and black society and deals the themes of racial oppression and black victimization. Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) presents the theme on racism and it provides an extended depiction of the ways in which internalized white beauty standards deform the lives of black girls and women. This paper examines how race and racial oppression works in the construction of Whites' hatred against Blacks and how the cultural ideals based on skin color and physical features function as rigging of racial oppression.

**Keywords:** race, racism, bluest eye, toni morrison

### Introduction

Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970. The novel tells the story of Pecola Breed Love, a young black girl persuaded of her own ugliness who desires nothing more than to have blue eyes. Through Pecola Breed Love, Morrison vividly unfolds African American's responses and reactions to the overpowering standards of beauty in western culture; rejection, alienation, self-hatred and inevitable destruction. Morrison provides a dramatic insight into the psychical process in retort to direct racial discrimination, by the portrayal of the smaller girl child Claudia: "*Not in prejudiced by the white culture yet, little Claudia has not arrived at the turning point in the development of her psyche, which would consent her to love these blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned dolls*" (Morrison, 1999, p.5) <sup>[4]</sup>. What Claudia perceives at that time is "*unconscious hatred, which ranges from white dolls to all the white girls*" (Cheng, 2000, p.195). The Black children commence with a healthy, direct detestation of white superiority. However, when they get hurt as a consequence of that hatred they receive the reinforcement of the significance that whiteness is beautiful and blackness is ugly and they begin to look for sanctuary. "*The best hiding place was love. Thus the conversion from pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love.*" (Morrison, 1999, p.16) <sup>[4]</sup>. The adult Claudia confess that, "*I learn much later to worship Shirley Temple, just as I learn to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learn, that the change is adjustment, without improvement*" (Morrison, 1999, p.16) <sup>[4]</sup>. The adult Claudia diagnosis the Black community's adoration of white images as a complicated kind of self-hatred, but they change hatred into a false love to compensate. Popular culture can sometimes accelerate this hushed transformation, because the atmosphere it creates and racist dispatch are so prevalent that they are difficult to ignore. Therefore, African Americans are especially vulnerable to the messages conveyed by popular culture that white beauty will inevitably dominate people's life.

Things certainly not turn out that simple. If these cultural ideals, which function as tools of racial oppression, are only strained upon the African-Americans, Pecola would never turn

to tragedy. It is not to declare that external forces, such as racism and sexism, are insignificant, but "*the ontological structures and mythological thought methods that blacks develop to define and reinforce their definitions of self and existence*" (Samuels & Clenora, 1999, p.78) have a more destructive effect on them. Morrison exposed roughly that African American's reverence of white culture, along with their hopelessness, like Pecola's ugliness, is a state of being that is both forced upon and preferred by them. This is why much censure of Morrison's works places her in an 'included' literary tradition but does not identify her with the tradition that has regarded as much African-American literature, a tradition that "*portrays racism as a definite evil*" (Eichelberger, 1999, p.59) <sup>[4]</sup>. To Morrison, only when people prefer and accept these white-defined values, accomplish to internalize them and view the world through the eyes of white culture. Pecola's shopping experience to Mr. Yacobowski grocery hoard; there are some instants when Pecola for the moment succeeds in breaking the destructive correlation between what she sees and how people see her.

When she deliberates that dandelions are pretty she implicitly distinguish that beauty can be formed by seeing rather than by being seen. By the same logic, she could redefine herself as beautiful even without blue eyes. However, Miner has noted that the "*effect of popular American culture's specular construction of beauty is that it bestows presence or absence*" (p.93). One's visibility depends upon one's beauty, which is much poorer than mere judgment of beautiful and ugly. Pecola's shopping experience well serve up as an outward reflection of the process of internalization of white values. When Pecola walks to the grocery hoard to buy candy, she encounters "*the total absence of human recognition- the glazed separateness*" (Morrison, 1999, p. 36) <sup>[4]</sup>. Mr. Yacobowski cannot recognize Pecola's being there as a subject because he simply cannot seem at her, "*How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper... see a little black girl?*" (Morrison, 1999, p.36) <sup>[4]</sup>. These are merely reinforcements of the persuade of the white-beauty standard; Pecola's response to Yacobowski, however, is of vital importance. After she leaves the grocery hoard, she

temporarily experiences a healthy anger, but it gives way to disgrace.

Morrison annotates that “*anger is better, there is a sense of being in anger, a reality and presence, an awareness of worth, it is a lovely surging*” (p.37-38). But rather than sustaining this inventive act, Pecola acquiesces and “*the anger will not hold; it sleeps. The shame wells up again*” (Morrison, 1999, p. 38) <sup>[4]</sup>. Pecola construes poor treatment and abuse as her own fault. She believes that the way people examine her is more dependable than what she herself observes. Then she deems dandelions are ugly. She takes solace in eating the candy, but, further importantly, in symbolically assimilating the smiling picture of the blue-eyed, blond-haired little girl on the wrapping, she eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is one way or another to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane (Morrison, 1999, p. 38) <sup>[4]</sup>. In this process, Pecola decides and internalizes within herself the principles of white superiority values, thus subsequently lives a life of self-hatred, and predictable destruction. Another supportive instance is from Pauline’s mother, Mrs. Pauline Breedlove. Pecola’s own mother reinforces the notion that the girls have been receptive about the superiority of whites. For Mrs. Pauline Breedlove, shows are the primary vehicle for transmitting white descriptions for public consumption. She soaks up the set of values from the silver screen, then imposes a severe wound on her husband and children who fail by “*the scale of absolute beauty*” (Matthews, 1997, p.188). Ultimately, Pauline gives up on her own family and obtains refuge in the yielding beauty surrounding the Fishers’ home.

When she converse to Pecola and her friends, her voice is similar to “*rotten pieces of apple, but when she speaks to the white girl, her voice are like honey*” (Morrison, 1999, p.78) <sup>[4]</sup>. Her longing to deny her daughter is showed when the white girl asks who the black children are and Mrs. Breedlove eludes answering her. She has repudiated her own black family for the family of her white employer. It is refusal longer the direct oppression of black by white, but oppression of a daughter by her mother who internalizes the white criterion of beauty and employs it as a tool to hurt her own daughter. For all races and individuals, it is necessary to fully recognize how mass culture touches, influence and shapes our values and beliefs merely after fully understanding that, can people endeavour to fight and grow to their fullest potential.

Since Morrison’s vivid portrayal of the subtle yet deep cultural influence, the reserve won great success, though the plot of *The Bluest Eye* is not so recent or different from those of other African American novels. Through her declaration on the hurt that internalized racism can do to the most vulnerable member of a community, a young girl, Morrison bounds out of the tradition of African-American literature that “*portrays racism as a definite evil*” (Eichelberger, 1999, p.59) <sup>[4]</sup>.

## References

1. Brittan, Arthur, sexism. Racism and Oppression. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984.
2. Dittmar, Linda. Will the Circle Be Unbroken? The Politics of form in *The Bluest Eye*. Novel: A form on fiction. 1990; 23(2):137-155.
3. Dittmar, Linda. Will the Circle Be Unbroken? The Politics of form in *The Bluest Eye*. Novel: A form on fiction. 1990; 23(2):137-155.

4. Eichelberger J. Prophets of recognition: Ideology and the individual in novels by Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Saul Bellow, and Eudora Welty. USA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999.
5. Hogue W. Lawrence. Race, Modernity, Postmodernity. Albany: State University Press of New York, 1996.