

Obsession of colour: A study of Women in Tony Morrison's 'The Bluest Eye'

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Toni Morrison is perhaps, the most formally sophisticated novelist in the history of African-American literature, whose work has been described as 'amazingly high'. In her works she explores the experience and roles of black women in a racist and male dominated society. She deals with the oppression of African People in America. Her main concern is for the true freedom of mind and soul of the black Americans. The novels of black women Since race, sex and class have been so interrelated in the history of America, it is not surprising that when black women published novels, they necessarily reflected on that relationship, whether they intended or not.

The Bluest Eye - Morrison's first novel was published in the year 1970. The story is about three black girls, and their friend Pecola. The story moves around a young black girl named Pecola who develops an inferiority complex due to her eye color and skin appearance. The novel is set in Lorain Ohio, Morrison's birth place, against the backdrop of Americas Midwest, during the years following the Great Depression. The point of view switches between the perspective of Claudia MacTeer, as a child and as an adult, and a third-person omniscient viewpoint. Because of the controversial nature of the book, which deals with racism, incest, and child molestation, there have been numerous attempts to ban it from schools and libraries.

The novel 'The Bluest Eye' is set in Morrison's own birthplace. Pauline and Cholly Breedlove are transplanted Southerners and several key scenes in the novel are set in the South. At the time Morrison was writing the novel, the racist society that condemned Pecola Breedlove was still very much in place and Morrison took great risks-both within the black community and American society as a whole-to tell this important story. While advances in civil rights and racial attitudes have been made in the intervening years, it is arguable that many of the core issues so vividly evoked in the novel remain transparent.

'The Bluest Eye' is a book heralded for its richness of language and boldness of vision. It tells the story of black, eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove. Pecola prays for her eyes to turn blue so that she will be as beautiful and as beloved as all the blond, blue-eyed children in America. In the autumn of 1941, the marigold in the Breedloves' garden does not bloom. Pecola's life does change-in painful, devastating ways. With its vivid evocation of the feat and

loneliness at the heart of a child's yearning, and the tragedy of its fulfillment, *The Bluest Eye* remains one of Toni Morrison's most powerful, unforgettable novels-and a significant work of American fiction.

The novel opens with an excerpt from an old-fashioned reading primer. The lines begin to blur and run together-as they do at the beginning of select chapters. The title of the novel refers to Pecola Breedlove's intense desire for blue eyes. She believes herself ugly and unworthy of love and respect, but is convinced that her life would be magically transformed if she possessed blue eyes.

The book provides an extended depiction of the ways in which internalized white beauty standards deform the lives of black girls and women. The superiority of the colour white is embedded in the contexts, where white baby doll is given to Claudia, the idealization of Shirley Temple, the consensus that light-skinned Maureen is cuter than the other black girls, the idealization of white beauty in the movies, and Pauline Breedlove's preference for the little white girl she works for over her daughter. Adult women, having learned to hate the blackness of their own bodies, take this hatred out on their children-Mrs. Breedlove shares the conviction that Pecola is ugly, and lighter-skinned Geraldine curses Pecola's blackness. Claudia remains free from this worship of whiteness, imagining Pecola's unborn baby as beautiful in its blackness. But it is hinted that once Claudia reaches adolescence, she too will learn to hate herself, as if racial self-loathing were a necessary part of maturation.

The person who suffers most from white beauty standards is, of course, Pecola. She connects beauty with being loved and believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by affection and respect. This hopeless desire leads ultimately to madness, suggesting that the fulfillment of the wish for white beauty may be even more tragic than the wish impulse itself. Pecola's desire for blue eyes, while highly unrealistic, is based on one correct insight into her world: she believes that the cruelty she witnesses and experiences is connected to how she is seen. If she had beautiful blue eyes, Pecola affirmed by her experience of being teased by the boys-when Maureen comes to her rescue, it seems that they no longer want to behave badly under Maureen's attractive gaze. In a more basic sense, Pecola and her family are mistreated in part because they happen to have black skin. By wishing for blue eyes rather than lighter skin, Pecola indicates that she wishes to see things differently as much as she wishes to be seen differently. She can only receive this wish, in effect, by blinding herself. Pecola is then able to see herself as beautiful, but only at the cost of her ability to see accurately both herself and the world around her. The connection between how one is seen and what one sees has a unique tragic outcome for her.

'*The Bluest Eye*' is not one story, but multiple, sometimes contradictory, interlocking stories. Characters tell stories to make sense of their lives, and these stories have tremendous power for both good and evil. Claudia's stories, in particular, stand out for their affirmative power. First and foremost, she tells Pecola's story, and though she questions the accuracy and meaning of her version, to some degree her attention and care redeem the ugliness of Pecola's

life. Furthermore, when the adults describe Pecola's pregnancy and hope that the baby dies, Claudia and Frieda attempt to rewrite this story as a hopeful one, casting themselves as saviors. Finally, Claudia resists the premise of white superiority, writing her own story about the beauty of blackness. Stories by other characters are often destructive to themselves and others. The story Pauline Breedlove tells herself about her own ugliness reinforces her self-hatred, and the story she tells herself about her own martyrdom reinforces her cruelty toward her family. Soaphead Church's personal narratives about his good intentions and his special relationship with God are pure hypocrisy. Stories are as likely to distort the truth as they are to reveal it. While Morrison apparently believes that stories can be redeeming, she is no blind optimist and refuses to let us rest comfortably in any one version of what happens.

To a large degree, the novel deals with both the pleasures and the perils of sexual initiation. The fact that all of these experiences are humiliating and hurtful and indicate that sexual coming-of-age is oppressed with peril, especially in an abusive environment.

Though all the three elements race, gender and class are present in all the novels of Morrison, the emphasis on them varies from novel to novel. The Bluest Eye, her first novel examines racism as a primary source oppression of the Americans. Toni Morrison has thus created enough space for domestic, racial, social and cultural interpretations. In all her novels she has tried to persuade the readers to re-read the questions of racial identity in nationalist term.

'The Bluest Eye' is a study of the various degrees of fulfilment women experience as women. Although Morrison takes pride in her black identity, values her ethnic heritage, and more prominently, inscribes her community, her artistic genius enables her to reach out to entire world.

Bibliography:

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. London: Pan Books, 1990. Print.