

The Triple Jeopardy- Racism, Sexism And Classism In Toni Morrison's -The Bluest Eye

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ABSTRACT

The most contested concepts of race, gender, class have an adverse effect in the lives of millions of people throughout the history. In White America, if Afro-American men suffer on the grounds of their skin colour, Black women are the victims of both gender and race. It is also interesting to note that race, gender and class- the three major sources of oppression of Black Americans in America are not separate entities but intertwined and closely linked with each other. Many a Black writer attempts to express the oppression faced by both Afro- American men and women in their book of art where "Literature has become an important vehicle to represent the social context, to expose inequality racism and social injustice". Morrison examines and analyses the social conditions that prevailed during 1960s in America and scrutinizes the problem of growing up black and female in a society which equates beauty with blue eyed whiteness in her first novel '**The Bluest Eye**'. The present paper is an attempt to explore the issue of Afro American female identity in Toni Morrison's The Bluest eye and explain the triple jeopardy- racism ,sexism and classism the three forms oppression portrayed in the novel for the victimization of the major character- Pecola.

Keywords : Racism. Sexism, classism, female identity, black and female.

I INTRODUCTION

In the realm of literary exploration, Toni Morrison's profound impact stands as a testament to the convergence of multiple socio-cultural forces within her works. The interplay of race, gender, and socioeconomic status emerges as a powerful motif, eloquently weaving through the tapestry of her narratives. With an unapologetic assertion of her identity as a "black woman writer," Morrison situates herself within a lineage of black empowerment, deeply rooted in folk culture. Born in

Lorain, Ohio, in 1931, she was nurtured within a family of storytellers and musicians, absorbing the essence of history and identity through their tales. Yet, even in the embrace of an ethnically and racially diverse community, the stark reality of racial politics was imprinted upon her consciousness, revealing the challenging coexistence of unity and discrimination.

Morrison's academic journey, marked by her transformation from Chloe to Toni during her time at Howard University, unfolded as a manifestation of her burgeoning identity. Her experiences with the Howard University Players and South-bound theatrical tours endowed her with a geographical and historical lens through which cultural identity was deeply ingrained. Pursuing higher studies at Cornell University, Morrison's intellectual pursuits delved into the thematic exploration of Faulkner and Woolf, hinting at the analytical vigor that would later underscore her literary endeavors.

After a teaching stint at Texas Southern University, Morrison's return to Howard University was accompanied by personal transformation as she embraced marriage and motherhood. The journey towards her seminal work, "The Bluest Eye," began with a short story, fated to evolve into a potent narrative grappling with the complexities of race, gender, and identity. Morrison's departure from academia and her embrace of motherhood in her hometown, followed by her transition to Syracuse, marked a pivotal period of introspection that culminated in her emergence as a preeminent literary voice.

The ensuing years saw Morrison's literary landscape flourish, with novels like "Sula," "Song of Solomon," and "Beloved" cementing her position as an acclaimed writer. The accolades and awards she amassed, including the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize in Literature, affirmed her prowess in illuminating the intricacies of societal stratification and human resilience. As Morrison reflected on her writing journey, she encapsulated its essence: an extraordinary means of thought and emotion that became inseparable from her very existence.

In this research paper, we embark on an exploration of Morrison's seminal work, "The Bluest Eye," as a conduit for understanding the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, and classism. Through the lens of her narrative and the tapestry of her life, we aim to dissect the intricate threads that Morrison weaved, unraveling the interwoven fabric of oppression, identity, and human endurance. As we delve into the realms of her narrative craftsmanship, we unravel the layers of societal dynamics, where race, gender, and class intersect, creating a symphony of voices that echo through time.

II RACE GENDER AND CLASS-THE BLUEST EYE

According to Boyle's perspective, racism embodies an ideology that bestows dominant authority upon specific races or ethnic groups, rooted in disparities of physical, cultural, and economic wealth. This results in an unequal power dynamic where the privileged race exerts control over the marginalized ones.

Within the narrative of "The Bluest Eye," a distinct manifestation of racism emerges, characterized by rejection, verbal abuse, and physical violence. Toni Morrison meticulously delves into the societal influences that shape our values and convictions. She highlights the profound impact of racism on the most delicate and vulnerable segments of society: children and females. This insidious influence leads to the development of self-loathing and the eventual destruction of the victims' sense of self-worth.

Through the lens of "The Bluest Eye," Morrison crafts a poignant portrayal of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl whose aspirations are seemingly unremarkable – a loving family and acceptance among her peers. Tragically, these modest dreams remain elusive for Pecola. She painfully discerns that the abuse within her home and the derision she faces at school stem from her black skin, unfairly associated with a notion of ugliness. Pecola's profound question of her own perceived ugliness becomes a poignant reflection of the corrosive impact of racism on her self-esteem.

Having never encountered the embrace of nurturing affection themselves, Pecola's parents are unfamiliar with the language of love, rendering them incapable of instilling a sense of value in their children. The emptiness of her parent's lives and their own negative image are particularly hurtful. Not only does their socio-economic status as poor African-Americans set them on the edge of the society, but their perception of themselves as ugly isolates them offering evidence of self-hatred [1].

Pauline Breedlove who has an eye of an artist, with her move to the city where she is seen as a country, her growing dependency on Cholly her need for private pleasure contrasted with her husband's introverted nature resulted more and more in disappointment and sorrow. Having a drunkard husband she became the Bread winner of the family bearing Cholly like a "a crown of thorns" and her ugly children "like a cross" Her job at Fisher's house allows her to fill the colours of her life where she finds beauty and order belittling her own home and family.

Pecola's father Cholly on the other hand has no mother and father. Abandoned by his mother at the age of four he knew only his father's name but who refused to accept him. His first sexual experience with Darlena has become a public show to the two white men who intruded

during his moment of privacy that distorted him making him lose his self image.

“Abandoned by his mother in a junk heap, rejected for a crap gave by his father there was nothing to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetities and they alone interested him.

Pecola's rejection started at an early age when she was born , Her mother Pauline Breedlove who herself is the victim of the white standards of beauty she has internalized as presented in the movies she often watched could not accept the ugliness of her own daughter.

The mythology Morrison explores in *The Bluest Eye* focussed on the standard of beauty by which white women are judged -Blond hair, blue eyes, and creamy skins are wonderful and superior. The pressure towards attaining the ultimate beauty as per the white standards which according to Pecola are synonymous to be loved and accepted by both white and black culture makes her long for Blue eyes. Pecola never considers herself beautiful as she was sent signals of rejection from her parents, classmates ,and friends and her social circle. Her admiration for Blue eyes of the whites which she desires to possess through some miracle.Pecola's longing for Blue eyes is her an external manifestation of the internal need to be loved[2].

The acceptance of ugliness as the white standards is the most devastating factor which destroys the self-image of women and hinders the self-assertiveness

Morrison expresses that when a community's vitality becomes contingent upon superficial beauty, shifting the emphasis from inner qualities to mere appearances, it signifies a concerning state of affairs. The notion of equating physical attractiveness with virtue stands as one of the most misguided, harmful, and ruinous concepts perpetuated by Western society—a notion that warrants our complete rejection. The significance of physical beauty, whether present or absent, held relevance primarily for those outside the affected group, particularly white individuals who wielded it as a tool to further their own agendas. However, this concept remains elusive to Pecola, who fails to comprehend its complexities. The repeated incidents of rejection, brutalization and harassment came to her mind. Pecola confronts in her life ,confirms her that she is ugly and that is the reason for people to hate her never realising that she was caught in the web of vicious circle of physical beauty of western standards as she is under the spell of white cultural domination[3].

Certain incidents portrayed in the novel demonstrate the pathetic suffering of Pecola. When Pecola accidentally drops the blue berry juice

in Fisher's house where Pauline was working as a maid and a surrogate mother to the white employer's daughter, she consoled the white girl and slapped her own daughter without even taking notice of her burnt legs. The reason for cuddling the white girl neglecting her own daughter is that Pauline finds white is beautiful and black is ugly.

Once when Pecola was on her way home from school she was bullied by a group of boys. They were circling at her and she was crying she could not do anything, they screamed at her:

"Black e mo. Black e mo.
Ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo black e
mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo . . ."
- (Morrison, 65).

Pecola finds rejection from a shop keeper when she visits him to buy Mary Jane candy who found nothing interesting to look at a black ugly girl. At the playground, Geraldine's son, Louis Jr., encounters Pecola and extends an invitation to visit his home. He lures Pecola with the promise of showing her kittens; however, his true intentions take a malicious turn. Instead of kittens, he hurls Geraldine's cat at Pecola. This act of throwing the cat embodies his deeply ingrained racial prejudice, echoing the attitudes nurtured by his mother's upbringing. Geraldine calls the blacks as Niggers completely adopting to western culture and refuses to mingle with black people. Her upper class status stand between the niggers and herself [4].

Pecola nurtured the belief that her world could transform into a better place if she possessed blue eyes and blond hair—essentially, if she radiated the kind of charm embodied by Shirley Temple. Pecola's damage is complete when her "dangerously free" father rapes her as he himself is the victim of the white culture where his manliness was insulted by two white men during his moment of privacy [5]. From there upon he hated the woman who bore witness to his failure and his hatred shifted to all Blackwomen in general. Yet another reason for his failure is his alienation abandoned by his parents at an early age, rejected by his own father Cholly becomes a failure and ironically unable to breed love as his name suggests. He realises that Pecola is rejected refused and dejected he showed love the only way he understood it and finally pushing his own daughter to insanity [6]. Pauline blames her daughter for her pregnancy and checks her out of the house but does not ask a single question to cholly.

III CONCLUSION

The poignant aspect of Pecola's victimization emerges not solely from the racism and interracial conflicts she confronts on her path to self-discovery, but also from the internalized racial myths woven into her family's roots within African-American culture. In "The Bluest Eye," Morrison's condemnation of racism is balanced by her recognition of the unnatural circumstances imposed on Black individuals within a predominantly white society. Her focus transcends placing blame on either white society for its oppression of Blacks or on Blacks for their treatment of women. Instead, she underscores the notion that each individual must shoulder the responsibility for shaping their own life.

As Lawrence Trightly astutely observes, Morrison's concern extends to the foundational structures and mythological frameworks that African-Americans construct to define and fortify their understanding of self and existence.

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