



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 9. Issue.1. 2022 (Jan-Mar.)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
EN 1118
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

THE BLUEST EYE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE BLACK PSYCHOLOGY

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Article information

Received:17/02/2022
Accepted: 07/03/2022
Published online:12/03/2022
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.9.1.98](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.9.1.98)

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the psychological complexity of Racism and the discourse of the white beauty in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*. For this purpose we have taken a critical study of three characters of the novel: Pecola, Pauline and Claudia. The main question that concerns the novelist is whether the blacks will wake up to the reality of the situation. Rejection of the White-discourse is viewed as the only solution for the future of the black race. The Bluest Eye projects two psychological set-ups which go in two contradictory directions. One pattern is concerned with the over valuation of the White-discourse and is followed by Pecola and Pauline, and the other is concerned with the devaluation of this discourse which is followed by Claudia. Claudia is author's mouthpiece of how other blacks should behave; Claudia's rejection of the White-Discourse seems to be the only solution to get rid of the established discourse of the whites.

Keywords: Racism, Discourse, Psychology, Race.

INTRODUCTION

Undermining the discourse of the white standards of beauty which dates from the ancient times, black literature, in recent times, has become a slowly emerging phenomenon. The overvaluation of the white standards of beauty goes back to Asiatic religion Manicheism founded by Mani, a Persian in the third century. The religion is based on the struggle of the two eternal conflicting principles: *God and matte, or light and darkness*.

In the context of America, according to Charles S. Johnson, the concept of blackness has held an unfavorable connotation in the popular mind. "Black is evil, black as sin, black as the devil are the phrases which suggest the emotional and aesthetic implications of this association. The evil and ugliness of blackness have long been contrasted in popular thinking with the goodness and purity of the whiteness" (Gunner Myrdel 1389). In other words, black and white are not merely a matter of pigmentation but have come to acquire moral connotation.

The domination of the whites over the blacks in USA was justified as a natural on the grounds that the blacks race was "by nature incapable of being of freedom and marked out for slavery." A French diplomat and ethnologist, Count Joseph Arthur De Gobineau, who is known as the father of racism, maintained this scathing belief into a theory. "I... have no hesitation in regarding the white race as superior to all others in beauty...Human

groups are unequal in beauty, and this inequality is rational, logical, permanent, and indestructible" (Donald B. Gibson 159).

As a consequence, the blacks were treated as subordinates and hence they were reduced to sub human status. The blacks were living human- beings but they were treated as inanimate entities by the whites. It is motivating spirit which has led many writers to the trace the history of black-women's writing. Both William Faulkner and Toni Morrison are credited with evolving a language peculiar to the blacks in America.

Until the 1940s, black women in both Anglo and African American literature have been usually assigned stereotypical roles. Throughout the novels of slavery and re-construction periods, the Southern white literature fashioned an image of the blacks intended to further submission and a dumping ground for those black functions which a basically Puritan society could not confront. Following the advice Shirley Chrisholm gave in the 1960s on the need to speak truthfully and courageously about their plight as women, Morrison in a 1986 interview asserts: "I write for black women. We are not addressing the men, as some white female writers do. We are not attacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving, loving way. They are writing to repossess, re-name, re-own" (Sandi Russell 46).

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The main objective of this paper is to bring out the possible shades and nuances that Toni Morrison examines in her critical review of the tragic predicament of the black race. The main question for the novelist is whether the blacks will wake up to the reality of the situation. All the resources of the novelist in gathering the energies in writing this novel comes from seeing the degrading of the blacks by the whites; no white should ill-treat any black. Morrison has felt the necessity to come out with a graphic account of what is happening among the blacks and she also launches into a question of analyzing whether what is happening among the blacks is right or not. The life of the blacks is the subject matter of the theme of Toni Morrison's novels. There is no joy and calmness in their life on account of the racial discrimination created by the whites. Under these circumstances their life becomes very complex. The desire to live a full-fledged life has become impossible for the blacks. Under the domination of the whites who refuse to give full freedom to them, the word 'complexity' is used only to denote the failure and struggle of the blacks to have a fulfilling experience. It is this difficulty of living with an attitude of fulfillment which is very closely analyzed in the critical review of the novels. Therefore, the three critical terms womanism, racism and their complexity form a kind of running commentary on the tragic life of the blacks.

The novel, *The Bluest Eye* deals with the pathetic story of a simple black girl Pecola who endeavors to be as good-looking as the whites in her wish to have bluest eyes. The intensity of grief in Pecola makes her depressingly a tragic girl and a sad woman as she feels that her complexion does not present a close resemblance to the white girl or the white woman. The woman in her being is shaken up by her intense consciousness or awareness of her own ugliness which is born out of a certain inferiority complex. The inability of a girl character like Pecola in her attempt at feeling being equal to a black in terms of colour and beauty is a particular portrayal of the tragic state of an African woman. Therefore, the tragedy of Pecola is the tragedy of a typical African woman whose average perception of life does not liberate the woman from the plight. In a sense, the entire novel is a plea for exploring the complexity of African womanism. Each woman character is typically a complex figure. Both Claudia and Pecola pass through the stage of girlhood. One is timid and submissive but the other is very courageously rebellious. They undergo two totally different experiences. The coinage of the term African Womanism is helpful in explaining the intense psychological sensibility of Pecola and Claudia. Pecola is a typical embodiment of an African woman showing a kind of complete submission to the tragic plight of life. But Claudia's womanhood is expressed in terms of resistance and fight against the white establishment. All the life energies of the little girl Pecola are spent along the line of acquiring the bluest eye to be good looking as the whites. It is an impossible task but what are unattainable remains to be a main source of attraction for Pecola. While Pecola

is a victim of the white system of values, Claudia is shown by the novelist as a strong denouncer of the same system of values imitated by the blacks.

The Bluest Eye: Black Segregation and Imitation

Toni Morrison is considered as one of the greatest novelists of the black literature. Her literature is deeply concerned with the welfare of the blacks but she does not spare any efforts or pains to criticize the behavioral shortcomings and limitations of the blacks. If she criticizes the blacks mercilessly, it is because she loves them really. It is from this standpoint that her portrayal of character and incident must be analyzed. The most important function of the novelist is to indicate the peculiar psychological frame of the blacks. Roughly four or five characters are placed in simultaneous juxtaposition with each other. In fact one can call such a portrayal an excellent character gallery. What these characters do to each other is what primarily matters to the novelist. A pronounced attitude is seen in the blacks who distinguish themselves from the other blacks on the basis of their acceptance of the discourse overvaluing whites. Consequently, such characters look down upon other black characters claiming superiority over them exclusively on the ground of an imitation of a white mandate. There is little realization in them to know whether they are right in adopting an alien standard to condemn and turn down their own brethren. A marvelous game of trick is played by the novelist in creating situations where the blacks are critical of the blacks.

Toni Morrison shows her brilliance in indicating to the black readers the white frame of cultural reference, which according to her is embodied in the "Dick Jane Mythology". The unwillingness of parents to attend to a child who loves to play is something which looks very peculiar. A surface reading of the Dick Jane Reader may apparently seem to capture the spirit of family togetherness and cohesiveness. But what Toni Morrison wants is a critical reading of the Dick-Jane reader. There is a reference to a dog which shows the white man's attraction which is nothing but a symbol for social sophistication. It can be even said that the mythology contains a concealed allegory. The parents turning away from the child may be symbolic of the whites turning a blind eye to the actual welfare of the blacks. Allegorically, in the Dick Jane episode the child is apparently alienated from the parents who are not satisfying the desire of the child to play. This description of alienation remains as an undercurrent in the description of the episode but this Dick Jane Reader is projected by the whites to all including the blacks as an ideal way of life to be followed. Toni Morrison employs a different kind of deconstructive reading to bring out the hidden implications of what the whites think about the blacks and how they should organize their life in a servile manner. The mythology is very simple but Toni Morrison is very clever in her analysis because what the mythology meant to the white is one thing and what it meant to the black is another thing. It indicates clearly an organized behavior pattern laid down by the whites which should be followed by the blacks and the rest of the race. The novelist thinks very deeply about the Dick- Jane mythology and she arrives at a conclusion that it is no longer a term of reference for the blacks as they have their culture of their own, which, if they realize, can furnish an equally enduring pattern of life for them. The mythology by itself does not belittle any human conduct. What it shows is a regulated behavior pattern. The episode according to Toni Morrison contains a concealed strategy to keep the blacks in a state of permanent intellectual, mental and physical slavery. This is a truth to be deciphered by a kind of unconventional and critical reading. Therefore, Toni Morrison says that the same regulated behavior pattern need not be followed by the blacks, however wonderful and excellent the Dick-Jane mythology might be.

The attempt is made by Toni Morrison in the novel "The Blue eye" to demonstrate how Pecola the heroine of the novel yields herself to become a victim of the Dick Jane Mythology. The opening pages of the novel subscribe to a telling comment on the behaviour pattern of the whites. Pecola becomes a problem to herself because she wants her life to be in tune with the white standards of beauty and dignity.

The novel is cast in the form of a drama where two character Pecola and Claudia move in two opposite directions. The main mission of the novelist is to build up a picture where Claudia acts as a total antithesis to Pecola. The program of Claudia is to resist whatever the whites lay down as the values of the blacks. Pecola is shown as a passive victim following the white cultural value system while Claudia is projected as an active fighter challenging the very concept of the whites.

The experience of cultural discrimination on the basis of colour is the outcome of a long established past. This condition of discrimination is compared to unchangeable and inert matter. Toni Morrison, through Claudia, hints at the fact that this condition of cultural discrimination has come to stay fixed like non-moving physical matter or stone. The word fixity implies metaphorically the element of unchangeability in a traditionally established situation where racial discrimination has become an unavoidable fact. But Toni Morrison is of the view that human mind is gifted with the power of creativity to melt the fixity found in the existing cultural order by radically reviewing and altering it. It is certainly a very remarkable insight on the part of Toni Morrison to create a character like Claudia and put forth an existentially meaningful passage in her mouth. Many black characters like Cholly Breedlove, Pauline and Pecola have no independence of judgment and originality of vision. The greatest tragic error is that they humiliate themselves in an unwarranted manner. The humiliation is a self-created psycho-neurosis from which the blacks suffer.

The phenomenon called psycho-neurosis is easily applicable to characters like Pecola and Pauline. What is meant by psycho-neurosis is the failure to face reality. So long as one follows a mirror image of someone else's one is not true to oneself. The actual problem is that the black characters like Pecola and Pauline have no faith in themselves and in their own choices of life. What comes to them is what they receive from outside. Actually what comes from outside is the reflection of the white mirror. The white mirror for a black becomes a mandate to them. It implies that the white mandate should be followed without any questioning. It is this unquestioning acceptance in the life of Pecola and Pauline that the novelist points out as a tragic event. Therefore this psycho-neurosis is the condition of hopelessness which is partly self-created and mostly imposed upon the blacks by the whites. The pre-established view is that what is aesthetically pleasing is what deserves the status of love. This is the image from which the black characters like Pecola and Pauline are not able to get rid of themselves. The white mandate according to the novelist is fraught with sinister consequences. There are obvious references in the novel which are put through Pecola, Pauline, Geraldine, Junior and Maureen Peal that the white mandate is the model. Only a very shrewd and formidably forward looking character is created by the novelist in order to devalue the white mandate.

Racism is a big problem. But internal racism is even a bigger problem. The main reason is that the external racism is blindly accepted by the black insiders without little realizing that the blacks are not alive to the real issues (the whites have suppressed the blacks for centuries and that the blacks must be free from this slavery). What the whites have done to the blacks is different from what some of the blacks have done to their own blacks. This is a shameful internal racial situation which is projected in some other incident also. The most peculiar thing is that Maureen seems to be much more beautiful than other characters. This is a pride bred by her adherence to white standards. The actual truth is that the white characters will never appreciate a black character like Maureen. What happens when a light-skinned black character is brought into juxtaposition with another black character, a new psychology is in operation (light-skinned blacks believing in their superiority over the dark-skinned blacks):

That they themselves were black or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth

CONCLUSION

The main plan of the paper lies in showing the agony of the blacks who live in a state of emotional unfulfilment. The reason is largely traceable to the conditions of life which are determined by the whites who use the blacks for their convenience and welfare. It is this story of the blacks who live in subordination to the whites which is discussed in terms of race, class and gender. The word Complexity carries the inner implications of the social and psychological struggle which the blacks experience. Their life is not so simple as they desire it to be. It has become tremendously complex as there is no possibility for a life of joy and vitality. The main theme of the novels of Toni Morrison is concerned with the destiny of the black race. A careful selection of the two novels indicating the problems arising in the life of the black race has been made. The objective of such an endeavor is only to highlight some basic issues connected with the psychology and the sociology of the blacks. Anyway, the black cultural sociology is yet to evolve into a new scheme. Till it sees the light of the day the blacks

cannot feel proud to achieve an emancipation. Their complacency, a kind of smug self-satisfaction with the existing conditions of life, some enduring the whites, some imitating the whites, some claiming and feeling superior to the blacks in spite of their being the blacks are matters of contradiction to the novelist as they remain in ignorance and unenlightenment. In fact, every novel of Toni Morrison is meant to be a lesson to learn for every black. It is a deep reading of the psycho-pathology of the black race. The minds of the blacks are warped and twisted by the values imposed on them by the whites. In the language of Freud neurosis and psycho-pathology are nothing but failures on the part of anyone to face reality and come to terms with it. This is applicable to the blacks because they are yet to see the reality. What they now see is only a mirror of reflection of reality shown by the white system of values.

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