
Imitation as Suicide: Rejection and Dejection as the conflicts within the self in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

Morrison wants to explore the ways by which race, class and beauty have taken a toll on the lives of the black people. Pecola is one of the many scapegoats who have been victimized because of self loath and self destruction. The paper is an attempt to show the cultural cross roads which the black people have reached. On the one hand, they are not willing to get back to their own culture and on the other they are not accepted by the white culture which overlooks and sidesteps them even if they imitate the white. Morrison wants to establish the central idea of how hatred and negation can lead one to madness and loss of the self.

Key Words: Blackness, Beauty, Rejection, Hatred

The Bluest Eye has a lot of concerns and underlying motives more than what the author had even thought of initially as the purpose of her writings. It took close to ten years for Morrison to sit back and reflect on the novel's conceiving and creation of a story line. Initially, she wanted to make sure that the novel was not to publish because she felt that she needed a novel to read it for herself. After a while, when she looked at the social and political commotions around her, she felt that the novel needs to have its printed circulation. Morrison in one of her interviews given to the BBC documentary had given a detailed story about the novel's origins as seen in the interview given to Rachel Khadzi Ghansah. As a girl of ten, she had been conversing with one of school friends when she told the author that she does not believe in the existence of God. The reason being, she had been praying for blue eyes for two years

now and God had not granted her one. This very thought gave into Morrison a culmination of two ideas, the first, how would a black girl look in case she had blue eyes and the second, how could the world beauty get into a ten year old girl because the words sweet and cute would be apt to describe a child but she had gone a step further to use the word beautiful which had made the author flabbergasted.

At ten, you don't think in those terms. Somebody is cute or you know, whatever but not beauty. And that was the first time, I saw it, she was very dark, she had those wonderful almond eyes, high cheekbones, I mean, you could go on. And she wanted something other. The Bluest Eye was my effort to think in those terms.(2)

The novel begins during the aftermath of great depression, a time when the African Americans had been economically weaker, socially low and culturally unequal. Two important ideas are discussed in the novel, the first is how the blacks have been segregated and how economically backward they have become since the great depression. The other is the idea of beauty fostered by the Harlem Renaissance where a separate section of middle class emerged when close to sixteen million people had migrated from the south to the north and the western regions of the United States. There was a need to usher these people and make them feel proud and honored because they are black. The very thought of being racially backward had now shifted gears and they now need to instill in them a sense of identity and stability. The Bluest Eye was an attempt to give the blacked-out consequences of being a black in the U.S, oriented towards the weaker sexes, women and children.

The Hollywood Movies, the actresses and the consumerism had made the people around the world accept beauty as set standards of the white. It was during this time when Pecola grows up only to find that she has been hated by her family, her community and the worst of all, her own self. The reason the author chose a ten-year-old for her novel was because she wanted to show how the element of ego which would not have even grown into her has still made her, self destructible. In a way, Pecola was an immature image, a would-be adult who had descended into madness, a warning signal to show that this might get extended and extrapolated to black girls if they did not rise to the ringing of the bell. The Great Depression followed by Reconstruction gives a signifying symbol to the reconstruction of not only the physical, and the social self of the black people but also the inner self that should tell them that beauty is not to be set by or idealized by the Europeans. That is one of the reasons as to why Morrison negated and even dismissed the thought of writing novels that have impetus to Eurocentric principles. To her, the self was all encompassing,

which is to say that they need to improve and write about their self without coloring or beautifying their lives or the lives of their characters by imagination.

The immediate need for the author was to judder the sense of the self so that it does not go vulnerable and futile. The end of the novel according to the author was to make the readers moved and not get sympathized with Pecola but this was something which she could not achieve and hence the novel according to the author herself was an artistic failure. Paradoxically, the novel also served as an eye opener to the white world as to how the internalization of beauty takes its source from the external world of consumerism created by the U.S. That is one of the reasons as to why the Dick and Jane primer, which was circulated across the schools of the U.S to show the children there two model citizens, who were children, Dick and Jane. The former had a brown hair and the latter blonde. They were with their father who was powerful, an arching of archetypal fathers in the U.S, with a mother and kids who would play with pets.

The very primer could be taken as a source for many inferences. The first is to show how the black people who do not have an organized family look at the ideal white family, as an unattainable dream. The other is, how the primer sets the white world aside from the black world. The three versions of the same primer, the first one properly written, the second one, without any punctuations and the third with an overlap of words signify the class structural differences which exist between the blacks and the whites with the first one representing the white family and its values, the next for the family of MacTeers who are better in terms of economy than the rest of them in their community and the third is the family of Breedlove who do not have anything to flaunt or rejoice except the utter poverty and unrest that prevails among the Breedlove. The quote below gives one of the primers of the three which serves as a prologue to the novel.

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family, Mother, Father, Dick and Jane, live in the green and white house. They are very happy. See Jane, she has a red dress, she wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother Laughs.....They will play a good game. (1)

Even before the novel begins to unfold, there is this primer, a satirical piece of commentary on how an ideal white family is presented. The reason for including the elementary school primer in the novel is to show how education has reached the black

colonies to make them live like how the white people have been living. The family is perfect, and this is an indirect way to instill a sense of imitation that the blacks would be asked to abide by in case they need to live a life like these people. This is a stark contrast to the way the court of law had ordered the case of emancipation of the slaves. It said that the white and the black people will be allowed equal rights but they would not be allowed to live together as next-door neighbors. Paradoxically the white people do not want to entertain the negro because they feel that masters and slaves do not need to live as neighbors but why do they prescribe the same education to the slaves that makes the white supremacy visible and imitable to the black people? This is one question which the author wants to make not only her readers but also her own people to understand and comprehend.

The forward was inclusive at the time of the publication but the afterword was added as an appendix during the subsequent editions. The first section of the forward gives a problem and the last of it that came as an addition was a kind of justification as to why she had written the novel in the context of beauty. There are two premises which the author mentions, the first is the one that talks about being hated because they are colored people. The very sight of them makes the white detest them for no apparent reason except the fact that they are black and hence are not civilized. The other is the definition of beauty which the white people have begun to decipher, which says through a maxim that, "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder", the quote talks about the beholders as white people, and decries the inability of the black people to look at their own beauty and appreciate it. In a way, they are victimized on two sides, the first is by the white people who do not want to consider them as beautiful because they do not fit into the white standards of beauty. The other is the self destruction and psychological assassination which the black ones do to themselves, which is, they feel inferior and does not want to tone up their esteem on par with the white standards because they have been deemed inferior at work, at the face of the society and even in the movies. It is true that Pecola was named after Pauline watched the movie, *An Imitation of Life*, which is a parody, the name was an imitation from one of the movies and the blacks' feel that their life is would be the best when lived as an imitation by the white people. Parthiv Nandan Saikia in the article titled, "White Standards as Conflict Against Black Women in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison" gives a candid repercussion when life gets collective and imitation becomes a dire necessity.

The *Bluest Eye* portrays in poignant terms the tragic conditions of the blacks in racist America. It examines how the ideologies

perpetuated by the dominant groups are adopted by the marginal groups influence their identity. Bombarded by the image of the white beauty, Morrison's characters lose themselves to self-hatred and their only aim in life is to be white. They try to erase their heritage, and eventually like Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist who yearns for blue eyes have no recourse but madness. (185)

Rejection is generational, it is cyclic and this is the cardinal idea in the novel. Cholly is rejected by his own parents. After the death of his aunt, the only woman who had lived to bring him up without disowning him was her. He realized that he needs to find his father and then goes on a search trip to find him. Cholly is shocked to see his father drunk and stripped for cash and tells him that the money that he owed his mother had been paid and hence neither his mother nor Cholly have no rights over him. When he becomes a father, he does not know how to nurture a child because he had never been done as a child. The anger and despair which he had felt for his father and the racial segmentation had taken a new shape when he comes home drunk and looks at his daughter. He instantly rapes her with no feeling of remorse or guilt. Even Pauline her mother does not do anything about it because she wants to blame her daughter more than her husband. The entire society is callous and apathetic because they are somehow or the other bearing the cross of the white people's anger and angst over them. The life of Pecola is a reminder of how rejection and hatred can lead a child, a family and even a community to reach the bottoms of hell.

Works Cited

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