



Research Paper

## Examination of General Socio-Psyche Interaction Through *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

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### Abstract:

Toni Morrison is one of the most committed artists, who portray the black community in its variegated colours through her characters. She is one of the significant voices in the canon of African American women's literature. The acclaim and critical attention, which Toni Morrison has gained all over the world, is due to the fact her novels raise radically new questions about the African American life. The Nobel Prize awarded to her in 1993, testifies to her literary achievements. Thus is *The Bluest Eye* grotesque mirror, malevolent reflection throws Pecola in the endless gloom like millions of other black girls. Even the knowledge of human psychology and sociology has proved that the influence of external society on the human psyche is unavoidable. Morrison through her novel examines this general socio-psyche interaction with reference to the black reality in America. Even the title of *The Bluest Eye* is an indication of the impact of racial and cultural pressures put on a young black girl. It depicts the negative Picture of Pecola.

**Keywords:** Grotesque Mirror, Malevolent Reflection, Knowledge of Human Psychology and Sociology, General Socio-psyche Interaction

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### I. INTRODUCTION:

Toni Morrison is one of the most committed artists, who portray the black community in its variegated colours through her characters. She is one of the significant voices in the canon of African American women's literature. The acclaim and critical attention, which Toni Morrison has gained all over the world, is due to the fact her novels raise radically new questions about the African American life. The Nobel Prize awarded to her in 1993, testifies to her literary achievements. Reading her works is an act of faith. She is an 'outstanding voice amongst the black women's tradition'. The fame, and critical attention Toni Morrison has gained all over America and the world is due to the fact that her novels raise many questions, about African American woman, her problems, her relevance in the white, male dominated hierarchy of American Society. Morrison's works are signifiers of the terrible conditions under which blacks live in white America. She has won immense acclaim through a number of prestigious awards. Characters, predominantly black and female spring from her novels, ranging from children to old women. She portrays their world of pain, suffering and humiliation.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) not only expresses backpeople's conditions characterized by polluting environments, invisibility, and cultural dissolution but it also expresses one's dependency on the world for self-identification and self-image. The base for such imagemaking is nothing but specular dependency. In the *Bluest Eye*, Morrison focuses on the basic myth of racism that white skin colour brings with it cultural superiority, that the white is more intelligent and more virtuous than the black by the mere fact of being white. The novel brings this fact out how white is equated with beauty and culture and black with ugliness and savagery. It depicts horrors of this myth of how one sees the destructive picture of oneself because of such illusionary notion.

The novel is set during 1941 that is at the end of the Great Depression, when life was very hard for everyone and especially for black people. That is why the characters in the novel are bitterly ironic and shockingly realistic. The novel is a very dark and bitter depiction of the young black girl growing up in white America in the early 1940's. It is a predicament of a young black girl, Pecola Breedlove, growing up black and female in the white world, who feels that she is condemned to ugliness on account of her blackness. Her predicament is rooted in the malady of internalization of white beauty standards. Through the portrayal of Pecola, Morrison probes deep into the African American women's psychological dilemmas, oppressions and

trials. It also evolves the black consciousness of the sixties. It expresses the struggle for personal and racial identity. The central idea of the novel is the domination of black by believing in the white American beauty standards, blue eyes, white skin and blond hair. Due to such false notion, the central figure of the novel, Pecola Breedlove goes through unlimited oppressions and trials. It speaks about the tragic life of Pecola, a young black girl.

The novel tries to expose one of the damaging factors of racist and sexist oppressions on black women that, the white American physical female beauty standard adopted by black women as a measurement of self-worth, i.e. black eyes, blonde hairs and white skin are considered as the prerequisites for female beauty and virtue. If one judges oneself through these beauty standards then it is considered that women who are not white are not beautiful and hence they are inferiors. Morrison (1974: 86) states:

The concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the damnest most pernicious and destructive ideas of the Western world, and we should have nothing to do with it. Physical beauty has nothing to do with our past, present, future.

To point out the controversy in the environments of the white and black, Morrison has added passage at the beginning of the novel. The three different passages are also symbolic of the three different families living in distinct situations. The first passage is written in the simplest possible language, which shows a picture of the ideal American family. The second version depicts the same passage but without capitals and punctuations. It is juxtaposed by stark reality. But the third version is depicted without any boundaries of spacing and punctuation that is symbolic of the dark reality, deep confusion. The first tone symbolizes the alien white world, represented by Dick Jane family that introduces into the lives of the black children. The second one depicts the lifestyle of the Macteer family which survives the hatred poverty and racism that encounters in Ohio. The third stands for Breedlove family, which lives in deformed world being exploited by the ruling class. It is also symbolic of the wretched life of Pecola. To show the controversy between white and black, Morrison has added paragraph at the beginning of each section of the novel. A picture of the ideal American family is shown as follow. "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, Jane live in the green and white house, they are very happy" (Morrison 1970:7). But this world of storybook is juxtaposed immediately by stark reality Claudia describes:

Our house is old, cold and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room, the others graced in darkness, peopled by roaches and mice. Adults do not talk to us they give us directions. They issues orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at as ... Back Draught and Caster oil that blunts our mind (5-6).

Both the environments describe the situation how the white and black live in America. For the blacks living for a day is like a struggle, even sometimes their survival is a nightmare. Regarding Dick and Jane mother and father have time to play, but here with Claudia and Frieda there is a little joy. In depicting this controversial view of life Morrison expresses the dilemma, which the black child has to undergo. There are two worlds before a black child- the make believe world and the real world.

The narrator of the novel is Claudia who has insight and wisdom of many far older than she, together her and her sister Frieda through the innocence of childhood. "Here comes a friend, the friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game play, Jane, play". But no friend comes to play with Claudia and Frieda and the game, which they play, is also not a good game because it is the game of survival. While commenting on the atmosphere in *The Bluest Eye* in an interview which was taped on Nov. 23, 1981, Morrison says:

I was very conscious of that mood and atmosphere of my hometown in the first book *The Bluest Eye* and used literal descriptions of neighborhoods and changed the obvious things, the names of people, the mixed things all up, cut the description of the streets, the lake, and all of that is very much the way I remember for Ohio (Jones 1985: 127).

The body of novel contains the hatred of Breedlove family for each other, the racial predicament and Pecola's psychological traumas. It is represented symbolically by dividing into four seasons autumn, winter, spring and summer. We are acquainted to this when, in the very introducing chapter, Claudia realizes the failure of marigold to sprout with death of Pecola's baby. The use of the names of seasons indicates major part of *The Bluest Eye*. In the beginning autumn indicates the topsy-turvy nature of the novel, spring symbolizes the beginning, birth and rebirth. Winter in contrast is connected to death and decay. The blooming of summer is symbolic of the final moments of life. The seasons are symbolic of the lives of the African living in America. They reveal the psychology of the black women living in America. Pecola Breedlove is the main protagonist of the novel. She is a victim of obscurities of society. She is the ugly Duckling, but unfortunately she cannot change into swan. It seems that she is abused and ill-treated stepchild, but unfortunately she receives the ill treatment from her own parents Cholly and Pauline Breedlove. All through her life, Pecola endures the violence imposed upon her by her own parents. Pecola's journey towards doom starts with her mother Pauline Breedlove and her father Cholly Breedlove throws her to deep and endless darkness. The traumatic life of Pecola's parents is a kind of a prelude to her schizophrenia and her final victimization.

Through Pecola's portrayal, Morrison probes deep into the psyche of black girl who is tormented not only by whites but also by blacks. Pecola's invisibility and her futile life are depicted at the very outset of the novel. The flower seeds which are superstitiously planted by the two young girls in order to give life to Pecola's unborn child do not grow. They symbolize an unfulfilled life of Pecola. In the novel Pecola has an acute longing for blue eye, the blue eye is norm of superlative. It is imprinted on her psyche. She revolves around a dominant image of blue eye. Pecola is seen through the eyes of Claudia, another child who is the narrator of the novel. The blue eye plays a role of an instrument of torture throughout the novel.

## II. CONCLUSION:

Thus is *The Bluest Eye* grotesque mirror, malevolent reflection throws Pecola in the endless gloom like millions of other black girls. Even the knowledge of human psychology and sociology has proved that the influence of external society on the human psyche is unavoidable. Morrison through her novel examines this general socio-psyche interaction with reference to the black reality in America. Pecola goes mad, Cholly rapes his daughter. It is nothing but the manifestation of their wounded psyche. In the case of Pecola the wounded psyche appears in the form of insanity. The novel reveals the damaging influences of white standards and values on the lives of black people. Morrison's stunning insight reveals the disrupted emotions produced by living in a world, where white standards and goals are presented to blacks as uniquely important and, at the same time impossible for them to achieve. The novel is desolate; there is no relief or release in the novel. Blacks are left as victims of environment and Pecola is the most pitiful image who becomes victim of it of all Morrison's fiction. Even the title of *The Bluest Eye* is an indication of the impact of racial and cultural pressures put on a young black girl. It depicts the negative Picture of Pecola. Even Pauline's image is drawn negatively. But it is Mrs. Macteer and her daughters provide positive answer to the ideological environment.

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