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The Bluest Eye

Introduction

The Bluest Eye was published in 1970 by Toni Morrison, an African American novelist whose works addressed the harsh conditions and impacts of racism in the United States. The novel is set in Lorain, Ohio and it explicates the story of a young black lady, Pecola, who is raised in the years after the Great Depression. Set in 1941, the novel predominantly addresses white supremacy and the premise that dark skin and mannerisms are ugly. Pecola develops an inferiority complex that pushes her desires for the blue eye that she links to whiteness. This study examines some of the themes, ideas, and symbols in the novel.

Thematic Analysis

i. Radicalized Identities

Morrison explores the idea of White Supremacy and the way it was used to exploit the Afro-Americans' self-esteem. It explains the impact of white ideas about beauty and the black female identity, especially the pain that the Afro-Americans had to bear to achieve the standards of beauty that were set by the dominant white community. Morrison poses questions about physical beauty, forming self-image, the meaning of love, child abuse, and domestic violence. The central African American characters in the novel, the MacTeers, Geraldine, and Breedloves who are shown as very different and have different reactions to the dominant White culture. The White

culture defined beauty according to their terms, with blue eyes and blonde hair. The African Americans were seen as ugly with their flat noses, black skin, thick lips, and kinky hair (Miniotaité 53). From the perspective of the Afro-Americans, a woman's beauty was not judged solely on physical appearances. Beauty covered the spirit, body, and mind that are not separable from an individual (Khan and Md Shafiqur 28). The black female characters such as Geraldine, Peal, and Breedlove, and Pecola have tried conforming to the ideas of femininity that is represented by their physical beauty. Their trials were founded on the idea that they hated their blackness, and they are filled with self-hate. They do not have healthy self-esteem, and they see themselves in the eyes of the Whites who have idolized beauty (Miniotaité 53). The most common types of radicalized ranking views blackness as a despised condition. The ugliness of the family members is explained as unique, and that no one could have persuaded them they were aggressively and relentlessly ugly (Morrison 38).

Breedlove establishes her idea about absolute physical beauty through the movies she watches about White celebrities. She sees a beautiful world where white men take good care of their women (Morrison 123). The ideas of physical beauty are destructive because there is no universal definition of beauty, and these standards are subject to change and are arbitrary (Miniotaité 54). The American community divides the Afro-Americans into the "Lesser Blacks," and "Brights." To this end, women having darker skins are seen as inferior, while those with lighter skins are accorded admiration and more respect. Geraldine and Maureen Peal view themselves as being superior to their counterparts who have darker complexions. Geraldine belongs to the "different brown girls" who instruct black children about obedience and execute the White man's duties with refinement (Morrison 82). However, they are not free because whenever they deviate from a single norm, they are suppressed to their original form. The identification with "different

brown girls” offers them with a strong sense of comfort and safety in their artificial self. On the same note, Claudia MacTeer is the only character who has challenged the dominant culture’s values. Claudia does not adore the standards of beauty defined by the Western community (Miniotaité 56). Morrison claims that the changes of western ideas placed into the African American community reinforced dichotomous thinking and power structures, which were destructive and dangerous. The negative stereotypes were imposed on them for the legalization of the hierarchical racialized system and justifying oppression.

ii. Child Abuse

The *Bluest Eye* explains a little African American girl who wanted to rise out of her blackness and see the world. The story revolves around two African American families, namely Breedlove and the MacTeer family (Morrison 5). Regular child abuse had various effects on children. In the case of Claudia, it turned out to become a violent child while it turned Pecola, a naïve child. The first aspect of defiance of Claudia is when she gives orders without direction (Morrison 5). The children usually need the adults’ attention, seeking love and warmth that the adults cannot provide (Ansarey 53). Family violence is shown through the inconsiderate parents who stop the family bonding. Pecola does not have the stability and warmth in her home. Breedlove cannot nurture the self-worth feelings in her daughter (Ansarey 54). She is dissatisfied with the motherhood role. According to her, motherhood is a combination of maternal regret and rage. Cholly, who was alcohol, could not provide any affection for Pecola. Both Pauline and Cholly fight during the day and cannot give love and instill a sense of self-respect for their children.

These types of fights, alongside the verbal, emotional, and physical abuses, affected the children, and they started believing that their families were broken (Ansarey 55). Pecola was

struggling with moving from the horrific events because the paints were in-depth and consistent. Pecola struggled between the desire that one person would kill another person and the wish that she could die. The novel also shows the psychological state of Pauline that helps readers to understand the reasons she loved fighting with Cholly and her abusive behaviours towards her child. Pauline was very eager about the motherhood role since she had seen the way her mother's life had spun out. The influence of abuse on a child is also evident when Pecola experienced her first puberty. Pecola menstruated in the garden when she was playing with Claudia and Frieda, after which she thought she would die. Rosemary, a neighbour, threatened to tell Mrs. MacTeer that the children were playing dirty. Mrs. MacTeer took a branch from a nearby bush that she used to physically and verbally abuse Frieda, claiming she would have preferred pigs (Morrison 22). These are some of the instances that show child abuse in Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*.

Imagery Analysis

Portraying motherhood has been among the dominant preoccupations of the black women authors because it finds its graphic and vivid manifestation in their literary works. African American writers build on the experience of the black women and the motherhood perspectives to create a view of black motherhood in terms of both maternal identity and role. Their views of motherhood are a deviation from the dominant culture where African American motherhood is used as a unique idea of controlling black women. They are assigned specific stereotypes such as sapphire, concubine, mullen, and breeder, and also seen as eager for motherhood compared to their white counterparts. White literature endorses the capability of African American women as mothers compared to White women, and that the black women see motherhood as being the ultimate justification for life (Singh 2). Black women novelists challenge the mothering experience

and not the image of it, which explains a means of addressing the stereotypical images of African American women in white literature. The black authors have provided a vibrant representation of what a mother is and the means of mothering. In their views, mothering is profoundly and fundamentally an act of resistance, essential, and necessary for the right of black women that they use to fight against racism. They have proven that the state of African American motherhood has more depth compared to other stereotypes. The power associated with motherhood and mothering empowerment is what makes the world better for themselves and their children. Morrison shows the struggles of the experience of motherhood against sexism and racism and resisting oppression.

Morrison has regularly focused on the consciousness of African Americans, primarily that handles the problems of black women. What stands out from her works is the skill as an excellent storyteller who has looked into the hearts of women and men, and obtained a bitter-sweetness that is recognized in the modern worldview. Morrison's critical essays have added necessary depth to black aesthetics. They have enlarged on the themes of the roles of African American women and the understanding of the current black life, culture, and society. Morrison shows many elements of the African American mother in *The Bluest Eye*. Breedlove has a disability and the mother to Tommy and Pecola and is portrayed as one of the novel's negative characters. Breedlove's negative feelings towards her children are because of her inability to adequately providing for them. Breedlove feels that she is comfortable in the home of the white employer. This makes her ignore and identify a sense of pride in her culture and the family, which ultimately leads to Pecola's madness. Breedlove never fails to be an ideal servant at work (Morrison, 127). It was an issue of pride for her being in the service of the white man and guard their possession as if she owned them. Breedlove does all within her power concerning the "creditor and service people" on behalf of the masters and never lets anyone compromise concerning having the best from her workers.

Contrary to the situation of Breedlove and her family, there is a strong bond between mother and daughter shown through Mrs. MacTeer and Claudia. Like Pauline, she is destitute, and her living conditions are inconsiderate, and this sometimes brings Mrs. MacTeer as cruel and rough towards her children. However, Mrs. MacTeer reconciles with her situation instead of developing bitterness like Breedlove. Mrs. MacTeer is an understanding and loving mother who understands and appreciates the value attached to motherhood. Unlike Pecola, Claudia experiences moments of bonding with her mother. Close observations reveal that the economic repression faced by the African American mother causes their child's suffering. The mother cannot provide attention and care to her child in the day because she must work outside, and thus the child feels neglected. Pauline works as a housekeeper for a white family, and her duty is the primary source of income for the family. The economic situation of the family is a preventive factor from enjoying a comfortable position within society. On the flip side, she is physically abused by her spouse, and this affects the bonding with her children. Another reason for the unwillingness shown by Pauline is because of the life experiences of her mother, where her motherhood only led to more work and no happiness. Breedlove escapes into a world of fantasy and experiences pleasures from identifying herself with the white women in the movies.

Black children are affected by racism. Because their parents cannot shield the children from violence and racism from the external world, most of the time, they surrender as shown through Breedlove. Breedlove has failed to nurture the sense of worth from Pecola because she lacks self-esteem in herself (Singh 4), and this leads to more dissatisfaction as a mother. Breedlove has motherhood entrenched deep in her heart, and she never manifests. Pauline herself was not given proper care and attention growing up. She was entirely ignored by her parents, and she blames her parental neglect for her present situation. At an early stage in her life, she was introduced to the

traditional responsibilities of a woman, such as babysitting, that she executes effectively. Because of the racial stereotypes attached to black mothers, she experiences maternity hospitals as being wrong (Morrison 97). The racism, which is a controlling factor of every element of the life of a black mother and her relationship with the family, also dictates whether or not she has the ability to feel pain. Anger is directed to the children. Pecola is a victim of the violence, and like her mother, she believes in the standards of beauty established by the Whites. There is a distortion of the natural self for Pauline because she exchanges her role as an ideal mother for a perfect servant. On the same note, carefully reading the novel shows that Mrs. Breedlove and Pecola have not enjoyed any single moment of the mother-daughter relationship. She practices violence and force on Pecola.

It is the refusal of the maternal love that led Pecola into finding love outside the world where she began fantasizing about Shirley Temple and in the lack of the mother figure. There are also elements of detachment from the family members. Some of the naughty fights that were deemed as essential to have the home become lively turned into significant disputes, and most of the time caused physical violence even in the presence of the children. Pauline never missed an opportunity of making Cholly realize the failures in her life and her successful efforts towards being the breadwinner of the family (Singh 5). Regardless of all the blames on the part of Breedlove concerning her husband, home, and children, the idea that she is the strong pillar of the family cannot be ignored. The situations made her do so. Breedloves fulfilled the family's basic needs. Her inclinations towards the white employers were because of the appreciation and attention she received from them. Another reason that explains why she living the illusion was because of her childhood, where she was raised without maternal love. Therefore, Breedlove's life revolves

around the two worlds which she made for herself. One was being an obedient, caring, useful servant, and loving person, while another was being the controlling influence at home.

Symbols Analysis

i. The House

The novel starts from the narrative, “Here is the house.” In this novel, homes do not only show the socioeconomic status but also symbolize the emotional values and situations of characters inhabiting them. Breedlove’s apartment is decrepit and miserable because the owner prefers the employer’s house to her own. MacTeer’s house is dark and drafty, but it is carefully cared for by Mrs. MacTeer and filled with love.

iii. Bluest Eye

According to Pecola, the blue eyes signify happiness and beauty that she links with the white, middle-class. It also symbolizes her blindness because she gains blue eyes and loses her sanity. It could also be translated to mean the saddest sight.

iv. The Marigolds

Frieda and Claudia link the marigolds with the wellbeing and safety of Pecola’s baby. Their ceremonial offering of money and the remaining unsold seeds is a representation of a real sacrifice from their end. They also believe that the marigolds will grow, and this means that the baby will be alright in the long run. The marigolds represent the constant renewal of nature. In the case of Pecola, the cycle of regeneration is shown when her father rapes her.

Conclusion

As shown, the novel explores issues about the standards of beauty, child abuse, racism, and the representation of motherhood among African American women. The black female characters such as Geraldine, Peal, and Breedlove, and Pecola have tried conforming to the ideas of femininity that is represented by their physical beauty. The novel explains the impact of white ideas about beauty and the black female identity, especially the pain that the Afro-Americans had to bear to achieve the standards of beauty that were set by the dominant white community. Undeniably, the changes of western ideas placed into the African American community reinforced dichotomous thinking and power structures, which were destructive and dangerous. This novel also explores the concept of child abuse in detail. For example, the influence of abuse on a child is also evident when Pecola experienced her first puberty. Morrison has regularly focused on the consciousness of African Americans, mainly that handles the problems of black women. These themes and imageries have been explained in precise ways that help readers to understand the African American situation and how it shaped their lives in the long run.

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