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Racist Sensibility Causing Mental Trauma in Black People

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Abstract:

The present novel *The Bluest Eyes* is basically concerned with the contradictions fostered by racism. The Breedlove family is a black family. They have to deal with the same problems, situations and dilemmas as do the rest of the rising black community in the north. In this novel, Morrison presents the sufferings of black people due to their dark skinned colour.

Keywords: Racism, class, trauma, identity.

Since childhood, we all have been taught that racism is bad and should be avoided at all cost. We have been told that everyone is a child of God and we are all created equal. But we can see the traces of racism all over world. Particularly the lives of African-American have been critically affected by racism. Many writers present this conflict in their writings. They make a powerful case on the psychological oppression of blacks. They explore the tormented psyche of Afro-Americans in their writings.

The 1993 Nobel Literature laureate, Toni Morrison has been recognized as a strident voice for the exploited black people. In Lorain, where she was born, everyone was poor. As a child, she herself experienced poverty, hatred and racism which left long lasting effect in her life. It has a lot of impact on her writings.

In her works, she explores the complexity of black female psyche and a search of African-American identity.

Patricia Storace writes that Morrison firmly believes that no mainstream American canonical literature can be considered without the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States:

The contemplation of this black presence is central to any
Understanding of our national literature and should not be
permitted to hover at the margins of literary imagination. (64)

Race, identity and community are the main themes of her writings. She portrays the black community in her novels. Each of Morrison's works, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, *Beloved*, *Jazz* presents the issues related to black community. She writes not only about the misconception of the superiority of the white but also shows its consequences in the form of mental trauma caused in black people.

The Bluest Eye examines how racism affects the society of that time. Morrison investigates the effects of beauty standards of the dominant culture on the self-images of the African female adolescent. The novel is basically concerned with the contradictions fostered by racism and class distinctions affecting the black girls in White America.

Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel confronts the dominant culture spreading oppressive standard of beauty. Here, Morrison's narrative is situated in 1941. This time period featured tremendous racial discrimination against Afro-Americans. Since the dominant culture's standard of beauty did not allow Afro-American in 1941 to be considered as beautiful because of their dark colour, Pecola Breedlove experiences great racial shame, resulting from this oppressive standard of beauty. Pecola is a poor, black girl who longs to have blue eyes in the poignant, wistful hope that this will bring her the love she longs for and also somehow would alleviate the multiple miseries of her hate-filled, quarrelsome, violent family, ironically named Breedlove.

Pecola becomes the victim of the racist sensibility in a chain of black people including her own mother and father who have been twisted and perverted by the false and often vicious standards of the white world. She always thinks that if she looks different, beautiful, may be Cholly would be different and Mrs. Breedlove too. She thinks, may be they'd say, "why look at pretty -eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (Morrison 46).

Pecola feels that blue eyes are a symbol of whiteness, pride and security and she seeks them through prayer, through the intercession of a spoiled priest who has become a reader and advisor, and ultimately, through madness, when she believes blue eyes have been granted to her. She feels discrimination, just because of her blackness. Each night, she prayed for blue eyes:

Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes.

Run, Jip, run. Jip runs Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes

Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run

with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty

blue eyes. Blue – Sky eyes. Blue –like Mrs. Forrest's

blue blouse eyes. Morning –glory –blue eyes.

Alice and Jerry –blue –storybook – eyes. (Morrison 46)

The black children are whipped and beaten by their parents. But the white children are loved and cherished by their parents. Morrison begins the novel with a section of the Dick and Jane Primer:

Here is the family. Mother, Father,

Dick and Jane live in the green –and–

White house. They are happy.

See Jane she wants to

play..... See mother. Mother is

very nice Mother laughs

See Father..... Father is big

and strong Father is smiling.....

play, Jane , play. (Morrison 1)

Dick and Jane Primer provide the picture of the ideal white family, in which father; mother and children live in perfect harmony. But Pecola feels ignored everywhere. Even her mother finds her too ugly to love and her family does not support her. Shruti Das, in her study of this novel, says that “This attitude of the elders disturbs the young black children, and they grow up with a complex that they should be ashamed of being black. They feel slighted. Hatred and a negrophobia are generated in them as they fail to understand the disparity. They grow pessimistic about life.” (55)

Pecola is deprived of proper childhood. She feels insulted everywhere, at her school as well as at her home. When she went to Geraldine’s home , “Get out” Geraldine said , “you nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house”(92).

Geraldine eradicates all signs of her native culture in herself and her family. Whatever she learns is for the benefits of the whites. She is constantly watchful and wary lest the black reality should show through her carefully groomed artificiality. She imagines herself to be better than the rest of her society.

The opening paragraph is also about desire and its blockage, though what is desired is inflected by social determinates like poverty and ethnicity. Rosemary Villanucci, who is a white girl, sits in her father’s relatively new automobile, a 1939 Buick, “eating bread and butter”, an object desired by Claudia and Frieda, two black girls. In a gesture of racial and class exclusion, Rosemary tells them they can’t come into the car, and the experience of exclusion , combined with that of material deprivation and hunger, produce anger and fantasies of revenge in Claudia, “we stare at her, wanting her bread , but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance at of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth”(119) .

Jerome Bump observes:

By increasing awareness of the fears generated by judging by appearance in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison enables more readers to identify with basic situations of racism.

One of the most important ways in which Morrison has Claudia MacTeer to interface with the theme of the race is through her interaction with Maureen Paul, a young Afro-American female of a brighter hue than Claudia and Pecola. Through the interactions between Claudia and Maureen we find that Claudia has internalized her racial shame and she does not want Pecola to reveal her racial shame in the presence of Maureen. Characters Claudia and Frieda MacTeer show envious disapproval towards Maureen Paul, a wealthy and stylish lighter-skinned Afro-American girl whom the girls refer to as a “disrupter of seasons” (62). Maureen’s wealthy society within the novel makes the division between classes in black culture more apparent. The girls clearly representing separate societal classes do not relate to one another despite their shared race.

In a pivotal encounter where Claudia, Pecola and Frieda have an argument with Maureen about Maureen’s claim that light complexioned blacks are beautiful and dark complexioned blacks are ugly. Pecola’s disheartened and silent reaction endorses the claim that Maureen espouses about the shame. In demonstrating her tremendous indignation for

Pecola's conspicuous endowment of Maureen's reprehensible claim, Claudia states, "she seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing" (Morrison 73).

Pecola experiences a self-hatred that is the result of internalized racism. For Pecola, it manifests itself as the loss of her mind. Consider the following from the final section of the novel:

A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment. (Morrison 204)

Morrison seems to be suggesting that blacks should not allow the dominant white culture to script their identities. At the end of the 1960, when the novel was written, many blacks were countering the dominant white culture's negative image of blacks by altering more positive and enabling images in the black pride movement. Louise Edrich observes:

It is important that we look not only for the effects of racism, but also on the ways that those effects are resisted as well sometimes resistance is hard to see, other times it is obvious .what is sure is that although the effects of racism are horrible communities has maintained tradition and continuity throughout a history that has been committed to their erasure.

Toni Morrison's attempts at breaking the boundaries between races, classes and cultures are reflected in her works. She exposes the ideological basis of these social evils. As a black writer, she is fully aware of the wrongs the blacks suffered during the days of slavery. Her writings centre round the predicament of the blacks in the past as well as the present, but she scrupulously avoids any direct venture of the whites because she is the least interested in racial confrontation and wants to write for the people of her own race. And she presents a realist picture of the blacks.

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