

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDENTITY CRISIS IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study the struggle for personal and racial identity, the concerns arising out of perpetual racial discrimination that led to an acute identity crisis among the Afro-Americans living in a society dominated by whites, as portrayed by Toni Morrison in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Toni Morrison shed light on the black consciousness of the 1960s in her debut book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which was marked by an identity crisis as a consequence of racial and cultural prejudice. This identity crisis was defined by the black consciousness of the 1960s. The book's plot showcases the sad story of a young black girl who has an unquenchable yearning for a pair of blue eyes. She believes that if she gets blue eyes, others will see her as more attractive and deserving of respect. Morrison exposes the catastrophic repercussions of racial prejudice on innocent black girls, who are left scarred and devoid of any identity due to the impacts of the discrimination.

Keywords: Discrimination, Identity Crisis, Prejudice, Respect.

Introduction

Toni Morrison had a strong desire to produce work endowed with a fresh perspective on the history of black people and the significant oppression and suffering endured by her people. She had the goal of her books having a transformative effect in the most appropriate meaning of the word. She could feel the strain the African-American people had been put under, and she found it disturbing in its origin because they regarded their lack of beauty as the root of their shame and humiliation. The concept that black people want to have white skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair so that they may be on equal footing with white people is the fundamental theme of this book. It is sensitive for black people and a terrible state inside a racist social system. The theme of racism lies at the heart of this book; the color black represents something dark, evil, and wicked, while white represents purity, virtue, hope, and innocence. Morrison emphasizes that racism tarnishes the self-image of black girls and leaves detrimental psychological repercussions on their psyche. She also notes that this hurts their ability to form healthy relationships.

Toni Morrison planted the book's seed during a discussion with a close friend. Their first day of primary school had barely begun, and her friend said she wished she had blue eyes. Morrison turned her head to visualize them and was immediately repulsed by the image of what she would be like if she had her dream. Morrison stated that *The Bluest Eye* was her attempt to express why she had not experienced, and maybe would never have, the experience of what she had and why she hoped for such a profound change in her life. She said that this was the reason she wrote the book. The author saw that her yearning had an underlying sense of racial inferiority. And Morrison wondered who had looked at her and found her so lacking, such a lightweight on the beauty scale, and the novel picks away at the gaze that condemned her. She wondered who had made her feel that it was better to be a freak than what she was. She asked who had made her think that it was better to be a freak than what she was.

Pecola Breedlove, the main character of the book *The Bluest Eye*, comes from a low-income black family and longs to have blue eyes like those of white children. She does this in hopes that she will be treated with the same respect and consideration by white people as by other black people. She has the same desire to be liked and accepted by white people as black people. She is confident that the primary cause of her unfavourable personality is that she does not have white skin and blue eyes. She yearned for blue eyes like those of white children and was surrounded by the cultural message that she is ugly by definition; the only way she can find peace is by retreating into schizophrenia. She longed for blue eyes like those of white children. She was subjected to the cultural message that she was ugly. When Pecola's father violated her sense of modesty, it compounded her conflict and suffering to a greater degree. She is bound to a life of servitude even though she has done nothing wrong. Her neighbours look down on her as a pitiful person who has accomplished nothing in her life. She needed something that could never be satiated.

The narrator projected that she never went to bed without praying that she would be blessed with blue eyes. She had been praying fervently for a whole year. Despite feeling some degree of discouragement, she did not give up hope. It would take a very, very long time to get anything of that outstanding quality. She would never have seen her beauty if she had been subjected to the oppressive belief that a miracle could free her from it. She would only see what there was to see, which the world through the eyes of others was. (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pages 44 and 45.

Toni Morrison courageously sheds light on the devastating repercussions that racism has on black women. Pecola's unfortunate predicament results from violent prejudice and clashes between ethnic groups. Her lack of success may be attributed to several factors, including her insecurity and irrational obsession with achieving her goal of having blue eyes. The intensity of the emotion makes it impossible for her to dislodge the thought, even from her subconscious mind, that she is unattractive. She has a deeply ingrained belief that she is ugly. Her parents debase her. When a young black girl like Pecola has a sense of inferiority coupled with outward humiliation, this only exacerbates her inferiority complex. Pecola's mother has teased her about her appearance since she was young, and her father despises her because he thinks she is unattractive. Her mental decline may have been prevented if her parents had shown her the proper love and attention while growing up. The narrator goes on to say;

It had dawned on Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that contained the images and recognized the sights, if those eyes of hers, were different, that is to say, beautiful, then she too would be different. If those eyes of hers were different, then she would be different. Her teeth were healthy, and her nose was large and flat, much like the noses of other people regarded as very adorable. If she had a different appearance, one that was lovelier, maybe Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove would react differently to her. They may say, "Look at Pecola; she has such wonderful eyes." It would be inappropriate for us to misbehave in front of those beautiful eyes. (This is taken from Morrison's book *The Bluest Eye*, page 44)

Her unquenchable need marks Pecola's fight for her personal and ethnic identity for acceptance and affection from the people around her. Her family and the people in her town did not play a constructive role in any way, making it difficult for her ever to do so. Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's biological father and, in the end, the one who raped her, has been a pervert. He had an unwed mother give birth to him, and his father fled the hospital the day he was born, after which his mother gave up on him and left him dead three days later. This dreadful beginning is illustrative of his attitude and behavior daily. After the passing of his aunt, who served as his legal guardian, Cholly concludes that to fulfill his internal mission of locating his biological father and understanding who he is, he must investigate his past. This leads to a protracted search, resulting in a remarkable and highly crushing experience.

The suffering in Cholly's personal life continues. Because he is a black victim, he is forced to engage in sexual activity with two white police officers. While they were sexually assaulting him, they merely laughed behind his back. These occurrences had a significant influence on him. They ultimately led to his acting in a manner that he would not have done if he had been given enough direction and instruction in those areas. He was free to live out his dreams and even to and even then of which he had no interest. He was free to do anything he wanted with his life. During those times, Cholly enjoyed her true independence. His mother had dumped him in a garbage dump, and his father had used him as a gambler's prop in a game of craps, so he had nothing to lose. Because he was alone with his senses and cravings, these were the only things that intrigued him. He was in such a heavenly mood when he first met Pauline Williams. And it was Pauline or their marriage that accomplished what the flashlight did not do for him.

Most of the characters in "The Bluest Eye" are pining away for one thing or another. After having lost touch with who they are, they search inside for their identity. Pecola longs to have a pair of blue eyes. After the book, she is under the impression that those eyes belong to her. Because of her blue eyes, she believes that others oddly treat her, but she has come to embrace this treatment willingly. She longed for the affection and approval of society that she felt she was missing out on. She believed that acceptance and love were there even though they may not be, and as a result, she thought that she could endure. Pecola's journey to discover her identity ultimately led to her mental breakdown. She explains the concept of being excluded from a group using language understandable to her, even though she is not accepted by society for reasons that she cannot fathom. Her identity is shaped by her culture, which does not provide her with the direction or approbation that she needs, and as a result, she becomes who she is. The same thing happened to

Cholly, who isolated himself from the community. He behaves inhumanely and cannot come to terms with the fact that the monster he once had is no longer with him. He has no idea who he is now that he is an adult.

In his book "The Souls of Black Folk," W. E. Du Bois discusses the potentially damaging effects that racism may have on an individual's sense of cultural self-awareness and identity. The term "double consciousness" refers to two separate realities: a psychological conflict caused by opposing cultural worldviews and a debilitating resolution in which extremely derived and distorted perceptions of the self-constitute a single but alienated self-consciousness. Both of these realities are referred to as "double consciousness." Du Bois goes on to say that having a double consciousness, or the feeling that one is continually looking at oneself through the eyes of others is an odd experience. He describes it as a weird sensation. African Americans in the United States have always been in a condition of double awareness due to the country's history. After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teutonic and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of the seventh son born with a veil and second sight in this American world, as he says in the following excerpt:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teutonic and Mongolian, the Negro is the seventh son born in this American world. This world does not provide him with genuine self-awareness; instead, the other world is the only thing that enables him to see himself. It is an odd thing to say sensation – this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity, one ever feels his two-ness - An American, a Negro, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (W.E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*).

The *Bluest Eye* was essential in fostering an environment of revolution and developing black consciousness throughout the sixties. This was a time that was defined by a period that was marked by an almost evangelical quest for personal and racial identity. Morrison decides to focus on the preoccupation of black people in the United States with a standard of beauty that is both unavoidable and harmful. The writer asserts that one should strive to achieve physical attractiveness as a virtue is one of the most ignorant, dangerous, and potentially harmful beliefs that western civilization has ever produced. The story drives home the point that the Blacks are motivated by the conviction that blue eyes, blonde hair, and white skin are the touchstones of the current American ideals of beauty. This is the central message that the narrative conveys to the reader. The book takes an honest and nuanced look at the potentially destructive impact that white social mores and ideals may have on the lives of black people. It paints a bleak picture of black people's pitiful and sad lives in racist societies. In addition to this, it investigates how the ideologies that are promoted by the institutions that the dominant group controls impact the formation of self-image, particularly among black women. The persecution of black people within the backdrop of racist social order is brought to light throughout the book. A social order like this is a pernicious force because it refuses to treat blacks and whites equally.

Pecola's mother, Pauline, despises the ugliness of her home, her daughter, her family, and herself due to the racist culture whites have fostered in American society for centuries. Pauline works as a domestic servant in the home of a white family, and she hates the ugliness of her house, her daughter, her family, and herself. Pecola is Pecola's daughter. She takes it a step further by pointing fingers at her feelings of unworthiness. As a result, the book transforms into a tale that establishes the value of humans and investigates the potential grandeur of those individuals who have lost their way as a result of the ideas that they have internalized from other people. The lesson imparted to the white ladies is that their blue eyes, blond hair, and creamy complexion are beautiful and the surface expression of God and nature's most outstanding qualities. As a result, the author bases her work on the myth of beauty standards by which white women are appraised and deemed more attractive than other women. Black women face discrimination because they cannot conform to the so-called white standards of beauty and hence cannot be considered beautiful by white people. Pecola's desire to have blue eyes is not motivated only by a desire to improve her appearance; rather, it stems from a more fundamental need to be accepted by whites and blacks. Her precarious position results from the prevalent and deeply established racism that denies black people the absolute right to live their daily lives.

The culture that white people dominated successfully perpetuated the illusion that black people lacked value or beauty. Because it was applied to black people with such force, it has had a devastating effect on their mentality, preventing them from having any hope of succeeding in a culture that thrives on racism. The members of the Breedlove family have low self-esteem because they are convinced they are not deserving of love. Pecola, an innocent little girl, is oblivious to the fact that she is subject to the cultural dominance of white people. She has been rejected and abused consistently. Her life has been a living hell. She goes through something distressing from a psychological standpoint. Pecola is used as a scapegoat in a culture in which individuals are degraded to the status of things and are made to feel as if they are inferior items. In contrast to the typical African-American family and the one that the narrator (Claudia) comes from, her legal problem originated mainly with a physically and mentally disabled family. Pecola's life isn't like anybody else's, but young girls may relate to some of the things that make her vulnerable.

In the framework of racial and social order, *The Bluest Eye* is a narrative that recounts the experiences of African Americans victimized by whites. Morrison shows how being subjected to prejudice is upsetting and may jeopardize a black girl's life. The narrative that the white people were able to build up effectively was that black people symbolize something dark, terrible, savage, and vulgar. Still, white people are symbolic of purity, hope, innocence, and virtue. The widespread practice of racism does not allow for any room for the self-acceptance and celebration of racial ancestry in terms of beauty or originality. At this point, black people are most susceptible to the danger posed by white ideals of beauty. Pecola, African American and female, feels she has no choice but to abandon her cultural and ethnic background to conform to white society's expectations. Regardless of whether or not black people desired to be associated with the pro-white cultural phenomena in the first place, they were fatally drawn into it to be recognized as a part of American society. As a result, the sensation of acceptability is inextricably linked to the precarious

position that black people find themselves in. She is a victim of racism and sexism since she is both a woman and a person of color. She faces double discrimination because she is a woman of African American descent living in a culture that white people control and that is racist.

Conclusion

Exploring the social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally, the novelist mounted a series of rejections, some routine, some exceptional, and some monstrous, while making a concerted effort to avoid complicity in the demonization process Pecola was subjected to. Some rejections were routine, some were exceptional, and some were monstrous. Morrison did not want to dehumanize the individuals who had harmed Pecola, leading to her final downfall because he felt this would be unfair to Pecola. Morrison thinks that the statement of racial beauty was not a response to the hilarious self-mocking criticism of cultural, ethnic, and personal failings shared by all groups, as opposed to the harmful absorption of beliefs of unchangeable inferiority that are generated by an outside perspective. As a result, she zeroed in on how something as heinous as the demonization of an entire race could take hold among the most fragile member of society, a kid, and the most vulnerable member, a female.

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