

Exploitation of Women in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: A Psychoanalytic Approach

Siya Sagar

Post Graduate Student

PG and Research Department of English

Nehru Arts and Science College

Thirumalayampalayam

Coimbatore

ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison is an African American writer. She was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. She is the first African American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. She is known for her novels focusing on intimate relationships, especially between men and women and are set against the backdrop of African American Culture. Her real name is Chloe Anthony Wofford. Morrison sees her writing functioning much like storytelling did in the past. She changed her name Toni because people had trouble pronouncing Chloe. In 1953, she received her bachelor of arts degree in English from Howard.

Morrison started writing her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* in 1970, when she was in a writers group at Howard University. Morrison's second novel *Sula* in 1974 was nominated for a National Book Award. Her third novel *Song of Solomon* (1977), won a National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977 and an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award. In 1988 *Beloved* (1987) won the Pulitzer Prize.

Psychoanalysis is a practice based upon theories of how the mind, instincts and sexuality works. This paper aims to bring out the mental conflicts of the protagonist Pecola in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. It also brings out the exploitation and abuses the characters had to face in the society.

Keywords: Morrison, Psychoanalysis, Abuse, Conflicts, Exploitation

SUMMARY

Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* was published in the year 1970. The story is about an African American girl growing up during the Great Depression. The novel was banned in some places because of its sexually explicit content. The protagonist Pecola Breedlove equates beauty and social acceptance with whiteness; she therefore longs to have "blue eyes." Her story is told through the eyes of multiple narrators. Claudia MacTeer, a childhood friend with whom Pecola once lived is the main narrator. In the first section of novel (Autumn) nine-year-old Claudia introduces Pecola and explains why she is living with the MacTeers. The Breedloves are currently outdoors, or homeless, because Pecola's father, Cholly, burned the family house down. The county placed Pecola with the MacTeer family until the Breedlove family is united. The second section (Winter) consists of two short vignettes. The first of these is narrated by Claudia, and in it she documents Pecola's fascination with a light-skinned black girl by the name of Maureen Peal. The second section focuses on Geraldine and Louis Junior, a young mother and son in Lorain, Ohio. The mother and the son bullies her calls her a "nasty little black bitch". The third section of the novel (Spring) is by far the longest which have four sections. In the first section Claudia and Frieda talk about how Mr. Henry, a guest staying with the MacTeers "picked at" Frieda, inappropriately touching her while her parents were outside. In the second and third section the reader learns about Pecola's parents, Pauline (Polly) and Cholly Breedlove.

The fourth section (Summer) begins by delving into the personal history of Soaphead Church, a misanthropic Anglophile and self-proclaimed spiritual healer. The fourth and final section (Summer) takes place after Pecola loses her mind. In the beginning, Claudia and Frieda learn that Pecola has been impregnated by her father. The sisters hope that the baby will not die; they pray for it and even offer a sacrifice (a bicycle) to God. In the final moments of the novel, the adult Claudia tells the reader that Pecola gave birth prematurely and the baby did not survive.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

In literature, incest is the sexual union between family members, with a wish to revolt against taboo or law, or with a desire to achieve the most intimate of all possible connections with

another being. Many literary works, mythology and the Bible, depict incestuous relationships. In general incest has been regarded as a taboo. Incestuous theme existed in literature ever since the beginning of time. The tragedy *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles performed around 429 BC is the beginning in which Oedipus, the main character unknowingly having incestuous relationship with his mother Jocasta. Modern times created many criticisms regarding the incest plot of literary works. *The Bluest Eye* is an example. It was banned in a school because of its sexually explicit content.

Incest relationship and sexually explicit content was shown through out the novel. Pecola was raped by her father. Cholly's sexual experiences in the past bought him pain and hate for women though the narrator says at some point that Cholly and Pauline did had love for each other. Cholly wants Pecola to be a happy child. He didn't know why Pecola wasn't happy. He feels guilty for her misery and wanted to love her. But his love ended up as physical love which was actually rape. Pecola becomes pregnant by her father. For Cholly he was showing his love. But for already broken Pecola because for her deep desire for bluest eye and the experiences she had to face as a black girl, Cholly's action was a torture and it made her goes insane and she loses her child. We could also see Frieda molested by Mr. Henry a boarder who rents a room in the MacTeer family household. But Frieda handles the situation much better than Pecola. Pecola's mother is another victim of Cholly's abuse. Drunken Cholly physically hurts Polly whenever he is angry at the world. Polly endures her husband's brutality even after knowing what he did to Pecola. She declares herself as a martyr of her marriage.

VERBAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE

All those physical violence Pecola suffered creates a terrorising mental trauma. Emotionally she was abused. The whole world alienating her and not giving her a reason for living. Her mother ignored her even after she was assaulted by her father.

‘Please God...Please make me disappear’

This desire for vanishing demonstrates the state of her spirit's desperation. Her mother despised her for being ugly. She only loved the white child of the Polly's employer. We can't blame them because the society's standard of beauty was white. Verbal abuse was another

aspect. Pecola was verbally abused by her own people. She was called a “nasty little black bitch” by a mother and a son and they even bullies her.

‘These here women you don’t have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses. The young ones smiled a little’

This was a violent and cruel statement made by a doctor when Pauline was giving birth to Pecola. It demonstrates up to where racism can go. We could clearly state that both Pecola, Cholly and Pauline were emotionally unstable due to their experiences from the society.

CONCLUSION

Morrison’s novel emphasize the argument that abuse has a detrimental effect. As a result of the abuses, such as physical abuse, ignorance, verbal abuse and sexual abuse being inflicted in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* left the children with feelings of rejection, mental instability, and impulsive acts of violence. The abuses displayed in various situations affected the feelings, mentality, and actions of the children throughout the novel. There are many ways to prevent these unfortunate events happened to the children in the possible future. First is to stop this violence from happening in the first place. Abuse is a complex problem rooted in unhealthy relationships and environment. So we should take the children away from such environment. Give better awareness to the children about good touch and bad touch. Parents should be a best friend to them in order to create a bond. Thus they will share everything to parents. And creating a healthy circle for them is an important factor. No child have to go through the abuses in Morrison’s novel and Morrison herself made it clear that these abuses have harmful effects, that are always detrimental to the child later on. Another aspect is Electra Complex and Oedipus Complex. Children get biased towards their parents when they are not able to find a better person like their mother or father. Thus they end up falling in love with their own parents which is a taboo. Here Cholly grows a sexual interest towards his daughter. There are many cases like this through out the world. At younger age they are attached to both mother and father. When a child grows up, when they reach adolescence parents should distance themselves from them to a limit. But not to the extend that they have emotional instability and loneliness. Both parents and children should be trained about sexuality to avoid such issues. Children should be taught about

this from their parents, teachers or any trusted person from an age of 9-10. This we can avoid such taboos.

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