

Black, the colour of My Heart; Racism viewed by white versifiers

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the ethnic prejudice and social and cultural discrimination posed by the ever so privileged whites across the globe. Starting from the glorified Elizabethan Period to the present age, the writers could not restrain themselves from the vehement use of racial perspectives in their respective compositions. Racism has, however, become a subject for analysis which illumines a number of greater issues that gave the parenting to it. This paper will concentrate upon the many aspects literature has perpetually put racism in motion. Over the centuries it is glorified, yet the solution to its apocalypse was never mentioned. Initially, racial prejudices were borne out of social and cultural difference; nevertheless it remained a vague subject to many for being an unidentified and undefined topic. Over the years scholars and critics tried to evaluate several social & political institutions in search of a proper definition to this grim remembrance of various prejudiced acts and consequences finally reaching a point where we can justify in areas in connection to it.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Racism, Slavery, Hegemony, Black lives

Introduction

Racism, a metaphorical scar, if it can be described literally, is a social reality, brutish yet eminently persistent over the ages, across the globe. While reflecting about western civilization and its ill effects, a minuscule analysis can grossly be initiated in view of the social strata evidently lowering itself to a derogatory abysmal point. To begin with let us corroborate the definition and distinguishing attributes of the words 'race' and 'racism'. The sociological perspective explores that "Race refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant" where as "Racism is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioural traits corresponding to physical appearance and can be divided on the basis of the superiority of one race over another". Now, the crux of the situation does not simply lie upon the

various aspects of these two interconnected but polarized words, rather since the inception of the word or even before that, privilege has a significant part to play in the hippodrome. Being a part of the 21st century and a resident of a third world country, 'privilege', 'race' and 'racism' are those words, we have been acquainted with since our formative days. Beginning with wedding classified in need of a fair bride, to promoting a skin care brand for a lighter skin, the world is exacerbating the already worsened issue of racial attack. Be it the choke-throat of George Floyd or Eric Garner, the list of "I can't breathe!" is endless. This paper will primarily concentrate upon the clutches of racial attack by the whites in fiction and in reality as well to which no solution can be raised by the social reformers or the literary nobility.

In Depth Discussion

After exploring the basics of the problem, it must also be highlighted that literature does not shy away from donning this issue bravely. Although, many an individual vehemently protest the existence of racist view in literature, the fact however, is that racism is a prevalent metaphor existing globally. Programs, agendas and various campaigning are carried out in view of enlightening those in need of awareness; still no positive result comes out of all those prejudiced minds. According to the Webster's Third New International Dictionary, racism is "the assumption that psycho-cultural traits and capacities are determined by biological race and that races differ decisively from one another which is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to domination over others".

But this dictionary meaning has not sufficiently elaborated the words 'superiority' and 'domination', and the basis on which we might assert a race superior to others. To determine the various modes of racial approach in literature, I would like to point out a few English classics of all time. Tragedy shall remain a violent misfit if the motives to materialize an action of tragic inference are overlooked. Racial aspects have always been a facilitated plot point for the masters of the literature, be it William Shakespeare or Daniel Defoe or Emily Bronte.

This argument has been described in humanitarian perspective in *Othello* by William Shakespeare, *Oroonoko* by Aphra Behn and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison.

To put it literally, William Shakespeare has wisely chosen a moor in **Othello** as a counter part of Casio, who is depicted as an evidently attractive, handsome and light-hearted fellow, whereas Othello is surcharged with poetic glow but no radiant hue. Othello is undoubtedly black, black with blackness of a Negro. Brabantio refers to him in disgust of his "sooty bosom". He calls himself "Black as my face". Sadly enough, the playwright could not place him till the last of his cathartic action, as a cult romantic figure that the readers have witnessed in him at the very beginning. Othello is enamoured by the spellbinding beauty of Desdemona, the very embodiment

of beauty, virtue and purity portrayed in one single line with the colour that becomes the pride of her race!

“...Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow
And smooth, as monumental Alabaster...”

Excluding the sexual jealousy, that is largely the recurrent motif of the play, William Shakespeare, quite intelligently builds up the character of the protagonist, not only as sinner of sexual jealousy, but also sinned against as a victim of racial intrigue. His colour became a hindrance between the subtle line of trust and mistrust. He becomes an easy prey to the hidden attack of Iago, losing his beloved and his honour simultaneously.

In Eurocentric literary strata, a hero must have heroism and magnitude. An individual's action and the consequence of that action transcend him to the position of a hero. Here Shakespeare, for instance, has chosen a black face among a group of white agents to portray the role of the protagonist but has resolved to give him a cathartic fate as if it was an error to be born as black. The jealousy and prejudice bred over an imposed issue of being black and audacious enough to marry a Venetian beauty.

Crossing over another hundred years, there came the royal slave. Aphra Behn created a masterpiece with her prose story **Oroonoko, the Royal Slave**. The novella simply does not talk about the African hero but condemns the so called English enthusiasm for “collective wealth” which challenges the erstwhile dominant party, Whig's special favours to the property owners and slave holders. To discern what “collective wealth” is supposed to mean, the author, with her profound personal experience depicts the grim picture of the institution, fed on slavery, which has a vengeful bias on a particular colour. Aphra Behn portrays Oroonoko as entirely Roman, except for his skin colour.

“His face was not of that brown rusty black which most of that nation are, but perfect ebony, polished jet...”

Behn represents a certain section of people with utter ignorance upon democracy and power given to those guard in black attire.

In my opinion, there are a number of expostulations against Aphra Behn who apparently led a campaign on anti-slavery theme. But in reality she was just depicting a picture of monarchy that holds a stern sceptre and moral decree to posit its authoritative hold over a large section of people. Behn's preferences seem to choose the colour to which she belongs; otherwise she could have ended her novella by giving it an end to slavery.

Exposing the dehumanising cultural values of white hegemony **The Bluest Eye** by Toni Morrison is an authentic African-American voice. In 1983, Toni Morrison told Nellie McKay “Black people have a story, and that story has to be heard.” Morrison, thus, has a relevant double

voice – firstly hers is a black voice and secondly hers is a black female voice. Not only does she depict how crucial and detrimental racial oppression can become for black men & women but also, black women are subjugated to sexual oppression.

The novel opens with a parodic passage from a Dick and Jane school primer that inevitably portrays a white family that is culturally included to create a false consciousness. The novel not only deconstructs the white image of the society but also exposes the realities of life in an impoverished African-American community. Morrison brilliantly pointed out the erstwhile dominant Eurocentric vision that was the reason of debasement and psychic damage to many black girls around the world. Morrison rightly points out:

“When the strength of a race depends on its beauty, when the focus is turned to how one looks as opposed to what one is, we are in trouble,”

The Bluest Eye (1970) is the story of a year in the life of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl in Ohio who seems to believe that she has blue eyes. A series of misfortune, starting from incest with father and eventual pregnancy lead her to insanity. This plot explores the class ramification and the harsh truth of gender-oppression, sadly coming from within the black world. Tony Morrison points out the dominant Eurocentric vision and culture that bruises the psyche of a young girl like Pecola. Her hunger for love is manifested through an obsessive desire for blue eyes. Morrison also stated once, “The crucial difference for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot.” And the very truth deconstructs the falsified image of white society, disintegrated in its core, which expects a perfect white community with no other colour. The whiteness Morrison castigates represents the impoverished cultural values of society that is run by dominance. Pecola’s persistent craving for a pair of blue eyes is one of those much talked about stories of the marginalised and the minorities. Pecola succumbs to the hegemonic ethos of the whites because she is in firm belief that the standards and cultural and societal values of the whites are superior and to be yearned for. The tragedy as it seems is of “a little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes”, but the tragedy does not lie here, it lies upon the very society that cumbers her attempts to rise to an equal position. The desire for a pair of blue eyes is that unquenchable thirst to be white, to be accepted as the one among the whites.

Viewing it from a sub-continental perspective, there is a Pecola in every other Indian household, tormenting and suffering the anguish of having a colour that resembles night. India is another third world nation that is still under the domain of such ideal beauty basics. In spite of putting a number of fresh attempts to address racism, Indian people in particular and other foreign nations in general are still drooling over fair skin as an object of social brand. Movements like “Dark is beautiful” have made the occasional rounds yet it has terribly failed to eradicate this widespread public emotion attached with a skin colour. “In almost every novel or autobiography written by a black woman,” writes Mary Helen Washington, “there is at least one incident in which a dark-skinned girl wishes to be either white or light skinned with good hair”. This is a common picture if we take a step back and look around us.

Conclusion

Hence I would conclude my article saying that “black lives matter” reiterates, beauty is defined by colour that is white and judged by the mouth which is also white and black is just a measurement to establish the white domination, the power-hungry society’s psychological paralysis that the world is white. The freedom that is declared is not visible; this is another illusion for the black people. A vicious society looms large with sharp paws always taking the stance to pounce on the marginalised. It is, however, proved that to be born as black is to be born as a culprit and a victim too.

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