

The Crippling effect of Poverty on the Black: A study on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract: *The novel *The Bluest Eye* is partially based on Morrison's life where she writes about the helplessness of a girl to racial discrimination. It also discusses the Black Americans versus the White Americans and their culture, femininity and beauty which affected Pecola's perception of beauty. Pecolas is purely a victim of cruelty and is seen as an image of ugliness.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Culture.... consists in those patterns relative to behavior and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genesis. Culture has been defined in a number of ways, but most simply, as the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings – Useem

In 1871 E.B. Taylor defined culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by members of the society. Robert Murphy says:

Culture means the total body of tradition borne by a society and transmitted from generation to generation. It thus refers to the norms, values, and standards by which people act, and it includes the ways distinctive in each society of ordering the world and rendering it intelligible. Culture is...a set of mechanisms for survival, but it provides us also with a definition of reality. It is the matrix into which we are born, it is the anvil upon which our persons and destinies are forged.(14)

Morrison has established a distinguished status in American Literature in her dedication in promoting the Black culture that is needed to be applauded. She fights for the plight of women in a genderized and racialized hegemonic culture for its unjust oppressing against African – Americans by creating a consciousness in strengthening the values of black cultural heritage through literary representation where blacks were denied of equality and freedom in the white American culture. The dominant culture and the contexts in which black characters actively

persecute one another in response to marginalization by white culture will act as a framework for demonstrating the character's isolation from one another.

Morrison exposes the cultural activities of the White people and the Black people in this work. She notes that the White culture drastically affected the Black culture as well as the life of the Blacks. Morrison introduces Pecola, Rosemary Villanucci, Cholly, Pauline, Geraldine, Junior, Maureen and Mrs. Mac Teer to explore the idea of culture. In some places White culture wrenched them to articulate themselves as white. Because of that they have no equal value in the society.

Miss Claudia MacTeer, the daughter of MacTeer becomes sick. She has vomited in the room due to her illness. Day and night are not equal in all the time. Sometimes day becomes lengthier than the night and the night becomes lengthier than the day. Like this Claudia's health declines suddenly. She could not walk out from the bed so she vomited in the bed clothes. "Frieda restuffs the window. I trudge off to bed, full of guilt and self-pity. I lie down in my underwear the metal in my black garters hurts my legs, but I do not take them off, for it is too cold to lie stockingless" (*TBE* 8). Therefore Mrs MacTeer scolded her. "What did you puke on the bed clothes for? Don't you have sense enough to hold out the bed? Now, look what you did. You think I got time for nothing but washing up your puke?" (*TBE* 9). The incidents clearly exposes the culture of Claudia's family. Her mother does not like her vomit in her bed clothes. So, Claudia becomes sad.

Claudia worries, "My mother's anger humiliates me, her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness "take hold" (*TBE* 9 -10). Morrison brings out the cultural discrimination between the Blacks and the Whites through the mother and the daughter relationship. And the mother's heartedness symbolizes the character of the White.

Maureen Peal, a white girl, appears in the school, where Frieda, Claudia and Pecola are studying. First impression of human being is measured through the external appearance. Thereafter, the ways of talk determine the personality of a particular person. So as the social discrimination is being made by the society not by birth. Here Maureen Peal appears good in dressing, Sweaters, coloured knee socks, velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, muff and patent shoes with buckles. This dressing culture of Maureen has depressed and suppressed the other children namely, Frieda, Claudia and Pecola. The novelist writes:

A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care. The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me. Patent-leather shoes with buckles, a cheaper version of which we got only at Easter and which had disintegrated by the end of May. Fluffy sweaters the color of lemon drops tucked into skirts with pleats so orderly they astounded us. Brightly colored knee socks with white borders a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and matching muff. (*TBE* 60)

Morrison exposes the culture of Black and the social discrimination in *The Bluest Eye* realistically. Poverty in the life of the blacks forced them to wear dirty torn clothes. Their poverty made them slaves and ugly. Gradually they feel themselves ugly. Morrison writes :
The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and they staid

there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was it was not unique. (*TBE* 36)

Morrison conveys to society how their poverty affects their social life. Morrison exposes that the Black poverty is the base for everything through the Breedloves' family. Breedloves' dire poverty is exposed through the dress code of Pecola who is the daughter of Pauline. Pecola appears in Geraldine house, where she reveals the dress appearance of Pecola in dirty torn dress, the muddy shoes, Cheap soles and soiled socks. This kind of appearance shows the poverty of Pecola's family. Their poverty only separates them from the American cultural life. The richness of the White depressed the poor Blacks. The novelist describes:

She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks. One of which had been walked down in to the heel of the shoe. (*TBE* 89)

MyLot.Com says Money is not the God but not less than God. Morrison brings out the importance of money in human cultural movement. Money determines the status of human beings in society. Without money one cannot make himself, or herself in a beautiful manner. Money can only determine the living style of human being in a living apartment, way of behaviour, dressing code, status and equality. Breedlove family lived in an abandoned store.

Before they accommodated in the abandoned store there was a Pizza Parlor which leads to a Hungarians baker, earlier than real estate office and even before that gypsies used it as a base of operations. The abandoned expels the poverty line of Breedlove family. They made the store into two rooms by using the planks. One is used as a bedroom and another one used as a livingroom. Black houses are compared with tired ladies, because, "Three lined streets of soft gray houses leaning like tired ladies" (*TBE* 103). The novelist adds:

The large "store" area was partitioned into two rooms by beaverboard planks that did not reach to the ceiling. There was a living room, which the family called the front room, and the bedroom, where all the living was done.... The bedroom had three beds.... Trunks, chairs, a small end table, and a cardboard .. " wardrobe" closet were placed around the walls..... The kitchen was in the back of this apartment, a separate room. there were no bath facilities. Only a toilet bowl (*TBE* 32-33)

Morrison explores the culture of the White. Society discriminated the people according to their culture, external appearance, style, furniture, outside decoration and garden. All these show the extraordinary luxurious life of the White. And it reflects their wealth and economic power. They are fully grown up in richest level which reflected in their walking style which the novelist describes "a rich autumn ripeness in her walk" (*TBE* 60). White house external appearance is shining like a diamond stone. "The lakefront houses were the lovelies" (*TBE* 103). And outside garden appeared like a floor filled with flower. "Garden furniture, ornaments, windows like shiny eyeglasses, and no sign of life...The large white house with the wheelbarrow full of flowers" (*TBE* 103). Wide space in the kitchen, well furnished wood work decorations, well attractive cabinets. "The kitchen, a large spacious room. Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowed like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain, white wood work, polished cabinets" (*TBE* 105).

Morrison brings out the Black culture through the character Pauline who is later she known as Mrs. Breedlove (after the marriage with Cholly) and her mother Mrs. Williams. Pauline resides in Kentucky, a real town where ten to fifteen houses are there. Pauline was the

ninth of eleven children. She never went to school. She looked after the house without any interest. “Pauline was fifteen, still keeping house, but with less enthusiasm” (*TBE* 111). The novelist mentions her thoughts and enthusiasm grew up towards men and love of romantic mode. Her thoughts are echoing in mind not only in the home but also in church. It is mentioned in the novel that “Fantasies about men and love and touching were drawing her mind and hands away from her work....These feelings translated themselves to her in extreme melancholy..... In church especially did these dreams grow” (*TBE* 111).

In the meantime Pauline spent time listening to music carefully while Cholly Breedlove enters and starts to tickle and kiss her foot. She fell in love with Cholly blindly because already such a type of thought have immersed in her. On the other hand Mrs. Williams seeks for a job to protect the family from poverty even in her oldest age. She got a job cleaning and cooking in a white minister house which was located at the other side of town. “Mrs. Williams got a job cleaning and cooking for a white minister on other side of town, and Pauline, now the oldest girl at home, took over the care of the house” (*TBE* 110). Thus, their culture changed due to the poverty. Pauline had the feeling of fulfillment without hesitation. She never thinks about anything except such type of thoughts. So, she does not have any proper education, or any well sophisticated life. The circumstance has compelled her to immerse in such a type of feelings and thoughts. Cholly says :

My Sunday dress, and they mashed up and stained my hips. My white dress messed with purple, and it never did wash out. Not the dress nor me. I could feel that purple deep inside me Cholly come up and tickled my foot, it was like them berries, that lemonade, them streaks of green the june bugs made, all come together. (*TBE* 113)

Pauline’s isolation is aggravated when she, newlywed, moves with her husband to Lorain, Ohio, because emigration does create thorny problems. The only thing, in moving away from her rural Kentucky home, she has been culturally uprooted. For another, what with her family upbringing and what with the cultural differences, Pauline finds it difficult to be assimilated into the new society.

Morrison shows how the culture of the White discriminates her people. Through the various characters Morrison showcases their culture and mentions how they have immersed in certain cultures, and practices of the Blacks and the Whites are portrayed in an excellent manner by Morrison. And she indirectly says that economy is the base for making a good culture. It is established through the characters of Mrs. Williams and Pauline who are seeking jobs in White houses to fulfill their daily needs. And also the quarrel begins between the Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove for buying new clothes and to drinks. Morrison highlights how the new culture isolated them and caused a deep sense of loss in them.

2. REFERENCES

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