

Broken By Beauty - Society's Impact on Emphasizing the Cost of Blue Eyes in 'The Bluest Eye'

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Abstract: Toni Morrison's "*The Bluest Eye*" portrays how the society of 1940s treats a poor dusky girl - Pecola Breedlove, targeting her appearance and brutalizing it to the extreme. Pecola is characterized in such a way that she always feels ugly since childhood because of her dark skin, she pities herself that her tone does not match with the white beauty ideals. Toni sketches her as she gets zero love because the white toned ones emotionally detached her from themselves. She faces unimaginable racial discrimination even within her family. There she begs badly for love, thereby facing only rejection and violence. She does not find any help in her community but her longing for love does not stop. Pecola develops her intense desire to have blue eyes because if she had blue eyes, she could get at least some love which can make her overcome this inferior complex. But at last, her wish just led her to mental illness. In this epic masterpiece, through this narrative, Toni exposes the painful life story of a dusky girl who is made to feel a very deep insecurity and inferiority by her own society which made the innocence of the little child to crash as it was the inessential perception forcefully insisted by the society on the little innocent pure soul.

Keywords: brutalizing the appearance, pities herself for dark skin, zero love, rejection and violence, longing for blue eyes, finally led to madness and mental illness

Toni Morrison stands as one of the most influential voices in African American literature, consistently addressing issues of race, gender, identity, and cultural memory. Her debut novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is set in 1940s America, a period marked by racial segregation and deeply ingrained notions of white superiority. The novel exposes how these social conditions shape individual consciousness, particularly among marginalized communities.

Generally, childhood is usually observed as a beautiful period of enjoyment, laughter, love, and innocence where children grow with their own kind entirely filled with a joyful environment. Kids, being in this phase of age, experience abundant bundles of joy. They are not exposed to any kind of villainous terminologies; actual truth is that they won't be aware of all those. This zone of their childhood comprises of sounds of only giggles and happiness. They get cared for in the most special and sweetest way in all aspects. They are pampered by their mom, dad, siblings and all other family members. They are encouraged and appreciated for all their memorable activities right from the age they start to speak, walk, learn every little thing. On round of all these events, their all-tiny moments are captured, cherished and remembered for lifetime. They can never be forgotten. Though at the very beginning of childhood period, the kid could not recollect those moments, the ones around them capture every little thing as memories and cherish for lifetime with abundant happiness of joy. Moving on to the school days, they have lovely friends to talk to, share, care and play together with lots of laughter. No words to describe that beautiful bond of friendship and the cute little friends we got at that age. Also, we receive some special feeling of love and care from our teachers which will also be cherished for lifetime. Children will not have any exposure to any kind of hatred, enmity, oppositions, acquisitions or any villainous characters. Their cute little world will be filled with happiness and memories. When the children return home from school, they have their family to spend time happily with. They share their moments of the

day with their parents, have meals together, sleep peacefully together, and they learn something about life daily. This world of childhood hits different and remembered forever.

But, on contrast to all these, Toni sketches this piece of work 'The Bluest Eye' as a sorrowful life chapter of an innocent soul where this soul suffers ignorance, hatred and rejection from the people she faced. The novel begins with a description of the white family - Jane and Dick who are perfectly settled in a neat house. This house is filled with happiness, smiles and caring parents and the same way their children do too. They were singing songs happily on their way to school. Toni makes use of this scene to illustrate that life of childhood is not always the same for all innocent souls. He brings up Pecola's story to make us feel how does the other side of sorrowful childhood life looks like.

Toni Begins this story as - Claudia MacTeer is narrating the flashback scenarios of her childhood life. She lived with her sister Frieda. They both were from a caring family of black toned ones. Both had lovely, caring and protective parents who were also a little strict at the same time. Pecola Breedlove - a calm and innocent 11-year-old girl steps into this world because her house got burned due to her parents' violent fight.

Her heart is fully broken. She comes and stays here to live with them there-after. Toni depicts here that Pecola's arrival denotes that the mental state of a small girl child is very much disturbed because of her physical appearance. She thinks to herself that she was badly treated by the society of people around her only due to her black tone and ugly outlook.

But into the house she stepped into now, Claudia and Frieda treated her very genuinely. They accompanied her to school, took good care of her. She began to feel the joy of warmth being with them. Her mind was calm always whenever she was around them. On some day, she gets her first menstrual bleeding by this time getting confused and could not be able to understand what was happening. Both the sisters comforted her with lot of care and concern during this phase. But this comforting period did not last long for Pecola.

Pecola goes to school where she is badly mocked and insulted by her classmates for her ugly appearance. But she does not fight back for this, instead she stays calm and quiet as usual, but she feels badly hurt inside her. She feels very bad that no one was there by her side to support, heal and comfort her. Everyone around her just mocked her. Schooling period is observed to be a phase where true love and friendship is educated. But this sounded contrasting. This was the beginning phase of Pecola where she started to feel insecure because of her appearance, this childish soul was not meant to face. Pecola did not receive any love in her school, instead she was treated as an object to be mocked. This hurt her soul very deeply and could not be able to accept it. Toni depicts her school life as very much hurtful due to the mocking and betrayal she faced because of her black and ugly appearance. From all these mocking incidents, her heart begins to love the White. Her focus of love turned gradually towards Shirley Temple dolls - which were observed and believed to be the standard form of white beauty.

This is when she innocently wishes for her longing for blue eyes. Her perspective was, if she had so, people would love her abundantly. The racialism in her society made her appearance feel insecure and forced this innocent soul to long for blue eyes. Another incident also in her school hurts her heart badly. Maureen Peal - light skin- toned girl joins her school. Everyone over there cares for her superiorly, takes good care of her, here Pecola is ignored a lot. In this small age, she faces lot of neglect which she could not be able to bear. On the other day, Pecola walks to a candy store. Even there the shopkeeper - Mr. Yacobowski - looks at her in a strange way, making her feel insecure about her. This incident cuts her emotions deeply. The impact of white beauty made her buy a candy with white girl's face. This is such a powerful scene which picturizes her deep inner longings for White.

The novel then moves towards the centre point character, Pecola's mother - Pauline Breedlove. The society around which Pauline grew up in her childhood was hurting her badly. She urged me to come out of that society. And hence thereby, she married Cholly and had two children. Pauline could not fully love her daughter Pecola because she did not fit her expectations of beauty. Sad fact here is that daughter is not loved by her own mother. This breaks and shatters Pecola badly. Pauline is a working maid. There she treats the child of her superior Fisher family in a well-mannered way but hates Pecola to

the core. The hard to accept thing here is that the run-to-person for a child would be her mother. From there it is where a child will receive love and comfort. Even that is in contrast here in this story. Another hurtful incident was that Pecola was abused by her own dad in his drunken state. Pecola's home was filled with violence all the time. This little innocent soul did not receive any kind of love from either her home or her society. Cholly's childhood story is also similar. He was not brought up well and pampered which made him turn arrogant later.

After such a shameful incident, Pecola could not face anybody. Her mind was filled with fear of people's judgement on her. She could not step out anywhere. She could not open up and speak about this to anyone. Later when people found out that she was pregnant, her society gossips very badly behind her. She was discarded from her school. The only relaxing feeling here is she had her close-to-heart friends Claudia and Frieda stand by her side. Being kids, their way of thinking was they had Marigold seeds, if they plant those seeds and if those seeds bring up blooming buds and flowers, their belief was Pecola's baby would survive. Unfortunately, it did not happen. The innocent kids' faith was buried deep down along with the Marigold seeds. The society's perspective of criticism forced these kids to think abnormally, which was something out of practical reality. Thus, the baby is born and died too early.

On suffering all these burdens in unimaginable little age, she gets deeply depressed and goes to visit Soaphead Church - who is a man believed to have some special superpowers. She conveys her wish in her heart that she had, longing to have blue eyes. Instead of caring for Pecola's deep pain truly, he misuses the innocence of this little child. He makes her believe that God has granted her wish by blessing her with blue eyes with some impractical hopes of actions. Pecola begins to believe Soaphead's words that she has got blue eyes now. But reality hits her. She could not bear with the practical reality of truth. When she comes to know the truth about her fake belief in blue eyes, she cuts down deeply and could not bear the fact that her innocence was cheated by another one - Soaphead Church.

Some of the other hurtful moments were Pecola's society used her innocence as their weapon. They began to feel satisfied and better comparing themselves with Pecola. Pecola faces a lot of tragedy in this little age which weakens and breaks down her confidence to survive. Her innocence is shattered and destroyed by the ones around her pointing to her and blaming her on the mark-point of racial discrimination. On coming across all these barriers, at any cost it was not Pecola's fault for she has to be treated this way on account of her appearance.

So, as a result, this novel overall pictures how racism destroys innocence. Here, racism is not treated as an external act, instead it is a slow poison which is fed and forced internally by the ones around that shatters the innocent souls deeply inside. The major fact this society always is lacking in understanding is that it never ever lies in external appearance. The beauty standard is always determined by the character, humanity and the inner self.

A basic need for support that Pecola needed is not offered to her. One good side that finds mind relaxing in this novel would be the characters of Claudia and Frieda. Compared to the adults of that society, these two were very genuine little souls who stood by Pecola and cared for her. At this point, what Pecola needed was not something very extraordinary and it was not the one that could not be offered by anyone. Instead, it was just basic acceptance and genuine care for her. At least her teachers would have been kind to her, they would have insisted the other students act well towards Pecola, not to tease her, not to avoid her and not to hate her for her appearance. They must have taught them to care for her pleasantly, and they should also have done the same. Teachers should also have treated her normally as they treat other common children without any discrimination.

To understand the most real inner fact, just consider Geode. It is just an ordinary rock with no exaggerating outer side-looks. Just it looks normal without any beauty coatings. Nothing is considered as a mark of talking point with respect to its outer appearance. But when this geode is cracked open, it has marvelous and miraculous mesmerizing gems of crystals inside it. It reveals untold hidden sparkling crystals shining like stars. So, what looked unattractive from outside now comprises of beautiful crystals inside.

Like this, if people around Pecola looked at her heart and treated this child with pampering,

love, affection and care, she would have got a loving community surrounded with caring hearts. Her innocence would have been protected. Her madness towards blue eyes, which was never a possible thing, would never have happened. If her parents were caring and pampering her, her home would have been a pleasant and memorable sweet home forever. If her classmates and her teachers were friendly towards her, the amount of love she received would have been enormous. If all this had happened, Pecola would turn back and investigate her life that she would have grown up as cheerful, strong, bold, confident, ambitious and complete form of successful women. She would not have run behind the madness of getting blue eyes for beauty.

The fundamental level of place where she would have received love and care must have been her own home. Home is the basic and standard place to be spoken about where the primary level of needs would be satisfied for a child. Here is where a soul can get trusted emotional support and concerning shoulders to lean on. But instead, here, Cholly and Pauline have become the structural form of racialism to hate their own child for her outlook. When the people of her own house itself are not ready to provide concern for her, then how is it possible to expect concern from her society. In addition to this, same does her educational institution too. Educational Institutions are meant to be standard equalizers for everything irrespective of anything. But here, no social system supports her. Nobody cares about her sufferings and pains. There exists a lack of emotional education and discipline among the children of this society. This makes Pecola lag in her confidence level and even get poor in her academics too. She is literally avoided and socially isolated by her own community.

Toni tries to insist that still such incidents are prevailing in this society also. Pecola's desire for blue eyes reflects the internalization of racist beauty norms that privilege whiteness over Blackness. Morrison illustrates how these ideals are perpetuated not only by white society but also within Black communities, where colorism and self-hatred thrive. Children are being judged easily by their appearance even before they come to know about what this world is. In this age itself, they are injected with some poisonous discriminations which are not meant to be fed as input to them. This novel is an eye-opener to the people in society who still believe in those unethical beliefs which will in turn destroy the innocence of children instead of encouraging their cheerful achievements they produce and bring up. This can be taken as a warning that if the society does not still change their perspective ideas and mentality with respect to the topic of beauty and acceptance, it may continue to prolong and result in breaking of minds and hearts of poor innocent souls which will make them run behind some madness and foolishness in the thirst of searching where the actual beauty meant by their society lies. Later it becomes difficult and hard to bring them out their madness resulting in the shattering and breakage of their confidence to face society after a point of time. So finally, the only way for betterment would be a positive mindset of acceptance with whatever exists because this mentality would not show any kind of thought that will affect any soul around them. This remarkable novel by Toni remains a crucial text in literary discourse for its fearless portrayal of cultural violence and its call for empathy, self-acceptance, and social transformation. Through Pecola's story, Morrison amplifies a voice that speaks across cultures and generations.

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