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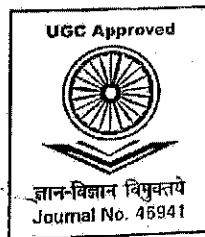
ISSN 0972-3269

THE ATLANTIC LITERARY REVIEW

Quarterly

APRIL – JUNE 2017

Volume 18 ■ Number 2



136

THE
ATLANTIC LITERARY REVIEW
VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2 (APRIL-JUNE 2017)

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Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* falls under the category of juvenile literature since it deals with problems of a juvenile black girl and her anguish and suffering. The novel's protagonist Pecola Breedlove is a juvenile girl of eleven years old and the other girls in the novel Frieda and Claudia MacTeer are juvenile girls almost of the same age. The novel's point of view is a juvenile's point of view because its story is told by Claudia MacTeer. Its tone and language have affinity with juveniles appeared in the novel. The novel explores the psyche of Pecola who desires blue eyes of white girls in order to look beautiful and be loved. It probes into the reasons that cause the desire in her and notes the consequences of that desire. *The Bluest Eye* is a story of a black girl's "hunger for love" manifested in "desire for blue eyes" (Gray 691). The bluest eye is the first and foremost of culture's parameters of beauty which the narrator, in the course of the novel, interrogates. Toni Morrison shows her concern to a black girl who is denied opportunity to enjoy what she possesses in her first novel. In the person of Pecola, the novelist creates a delicate, sensitive and equally weak girl who becomes victim of the culture's wrong notion of beauty. In her later novels—*Sula* (1973) and *Beloved* (1987)—Morrison creates strong, independent rebellious women who struggle to claim a sense of self, even at the cost of being cast out by their communities (Whitson 161-62). Pecola's weakness and passivity account for her age and void of support from her family and her society in her confrontation with the culture.

Pecola's entry into the world through school proves disastrous as she encounters hatred in the form of taunts from her schoolmates both black and white alike. She is hated by them because she is black and ugly. A group of black boys in the school circles around her and taunts at her. They call her "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadadsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dad sleeps nekked. Black e mo..." (Morrison 50). Their taunt is related to her color and sleeping habit of her father. Claudia, the narrator and friend to Pecola explains it:

They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control; the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence. (50)

Once the blackness is thought as a matter of hatred, friendship with the black person is not possible. Maureen shows intimacy towards Pecola only to insult her. Maureen's intimacy towards Pecola is a means to confirm whether her father sleeps naked. Maureen asks Pecola:

"Did you ever see a naked man?"

"No. Where would I see a naked man?"

"I don't know. I just asked."

"I wouldn't even look at him, even if I did see him. That's dirty. Who wants to see a naked man?"—Pecola was agitated. "Nobody's father would be naked in front of his own daughter. No unless he was dirty too."

"I didn't say 'father.' I just said 'a naked man.'"

"Well..."

"How come you said 'father'?" Maureen wanted to know. (55)

Claudia's role in the novel is not only to speak for Pecola but to support her whenever she requires it. Knowing Maureen's intention to insult Pecola, Claudia interferes in the conversation. The exchanges between the two girls reach to racial discrimination. From the other side of the road Maureen screams at Frieda, Claudia and Pecola:

I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute! (56)

Frieda and Claudia retaliate back but their retaliation invokes hatred from grown up people in the street. Here in the novel Morrison intrudes with her own voice that says, "Grown people frowned at the three girls on the curbside, two with their coats draped over their heads, the collars framing the eyebrows like nuns' habit...angry faces knotted like dark cauliflowers" (57).

The taunt intended at the racial contempt and hatred is painful; it has its worst effect on Pecola who "seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing" (57). Beauty or beautiful becomes a matter of serious concern to her. She ponders on her physique part by part; she knows that her teeth, her nose are far better than those of white girls who are thought as "cute." But what she does not have is the blue eyes—the parameter

It is strange that the black boys of her race are infected by the culture's standards of beauty. Pecola has no companion to play with. Junior, the son of Geraldine, invites her to play and harasses her there. He knows that nobody plays with Pecola "because she was ugly" (69). Neither boys and girls of her age would play with Pecola nor their mothers would like them play with her. Geraldine sends her away insulting, "Get out," she said, her voice quiet. "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house" (72). Nobody offers Pecola words of love which will encourage her to experience life around. All time she is subjected to the insult about her blackness and ugliness. Her situation is like an abandoned girl without anyone to care of. Geraldine's observation of Pecola makes one aware of the latter's condition:

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 into the heel of the shoe. (71)

The passage reveals the fact of Pecola living in miserable situation of poverty. Neglected by her parents and hated by the society, Pecola's condition becomes worst.

Pecola has no companion to play with or to go to pictures. Her brother Sammy avoids her and goes alone to see new picture. She thinks that people including her brother avoid her because she is ugly. Once she thinks hard to discover "the secret" of her ugliness. She believes now that it is her ugliness that makes her schoolmates and other people hate her and avoid her. In school no one shares a double desk with her as if she is not human. She is made an epithet of insult in the class. When the girls in the class want to insult a boy, they used to say, "Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!" (34). This insult brings her to the fact of absence of love in her life. She searches love in the eyes of other people; she tries to see it in the blue eyes of Mr. Yacobowski. But he does not see her "because for him there is nothing to see" (36). Pecola sees no curiosity about her in the eyes of Mr. Yacobowski instead she sees vacuum and distaste:

extremity of Pecola's case stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family—unlike the average black family and unlike the narrator's". The novelist explores "the social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally fall apart" and lists "a series of rejections, some routine, some exceptional, some monstrous" that contribute to the fall (168). The Breedlove family has fallen prey to the culture's ideas of beauty; they are forced to believe that they are ugly. The narrator tells us how their ugliness is unique and does not belong to them:

...their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness (result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior, the rest of the family—Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove—wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. (28)

The narrator tries to find out the source of the Breedlove's ugliness and she comes to know that it stems from their conviction of it. It is the culture that has told them that they are ugly and they have accepted it without any contradiction:

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (28)

The Bluest Eye stands out as a critique of the culture's idea of beauty. Its idea is based on the racial prejudice and racial discrimination. The culture's proposition is that black people are ugly and white people are beautiful. It is emphasized in movies, through bills and in their glances. All of them together

blamed for her failure to teach her daughter how to live in a culture alien to them. She cannot give Pecola happy childhood because she did not enjoy her own. Neither Cholly nor Pauline could enjoy their childhood. Deformity in her physique—cavity in her front tooth and limping leg—separates Pauline Williams from rest of her family and also cause her dream of life die. She fantasizes about love of men touching her when she is fifteen. She wants to be in company of someone and she may "lay her head on his chest" (88). Pauline's fantasy accounts for the absence of love in her life. Her fantasy comes true when Cholly Breedlove comes in her life taking her deformity "like something special and endearing" (90). Love flourished between Pauline and Cholly while they were living in the South—their own region.

The condition in the North-Lorain, Ohio, where the lovers become husband and wife, is quite different. For the first time, Pauline feels alone in an alien culture. She is surprised by the presence of a large number of white people while missing her people. She even marks the difference between the black people of the North and the black people of the South: the black people of the North share the "meanness" of the white people:

It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks...we didn't have too much truck with them. Just now and then in the fields, or at the commissary...Up north they was everywhere—next door, downstairs, all over the streets—and colored folks few and far between. Northern colored folks was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them. That was lonesome time of my life. (91)

In the North, Pauline suffers from "goading glances and private snickers" of black women at her "way of talking and dressing" (92). She wants to dress like them but to purchase new dresses requires money. The newly married couple quarrels over the purchase of new clothes bringing discord in their life. The quarrel affects the married life of Pauline and Cholly:

She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love; imprints in her mind which one it is that is coming loose so she can quickly secure it once he is through. She hopes he will not sweat—the damp may get into her hair; and she will remain dry between her legs—she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist. When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she will make rapid movements with her hips, press her fingernails into his back, suck in her breath, and pretend she is having an orgasm. (65-66)

Geraldine does not take sexual act as the revival of love and energy as Pauline does. For her it is an act without any feeling and its end is a moment of relief. Geraldine is reserved in her expression of sexuality and Pauline is open in that matter. But Pauline does not have the similar experience all the time. On other occasion, Cholly's loving seems to her like "thrashing away" inside her (102) and most of time she does not go near to him.

Cholly, too, like his daughter and wife, is the victim of culture; in addition to this he is the victim of fate also. When he was four days old, his mother abandoned him only to be rescued by his grandmother Aunt Jimmy. It was told that his mother was not right in her mind and his father left her. Cholly's story alludes to Oedipus's story—the protagonist in a Greek tragedy. Oedipus is abandoned by his parents because his life was predestined by God. Like Oedipus, Cholly is the innocent victim. This allusion to Oedipus becomes clear when Toni Morrison describes the funeral of Aunt Jimmy in terms of the structure of Greek tragedy:

It was like a street tragedy with spontaneity tucked softly into the corners of a highly formal structure. The deceased was the tragic hero, the survivors the innocent victims; there was the omnipresence of the deity, strophe and antistrophe of the chorus of mourners led by the preacher. There was grief over the waste of life, the stunned wonder at the ways of God, and the restoration of order in nature at the graveyard. (112)

Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep.... Cholly was truly free. Abandoned in junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perception and appetites, and hey alone interested him. (125-26)

Such a freeman as Cholly is fated to fail when he becomes father for he does not know the responsibility of a father. He has not experienced the relationship between father and children. He has never seen parents raising their children, not even his own. Cholly has no idea how to raise children; the appearance of them in his married life dumfounds him leaving him dysfunctional:

...the aspect of married that dumfounded him and rendered him totally disfunctional was the appearance of children. Having no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be. (126)

Cholly's reactions to his children are "based on what he felt at the moment" (127) when he watches them. His rape of his daughter is not calculated one but it is the fatal result of his momentary reaction to Pecola. On the very day of rape he, in drunken state, sees Pecola standing over the sink in the kitchen. Her posture makes him go through the sequence of emotions: revulsion, guilt, pity, and then love. He does not know the reason why she is unhappy and what he can do to make her happy. When he looks into her face "he would see those haunted, loving eyes" (127) of her. Her gestures remind him of Pauline's welling up tenderness in him. The narrator describes the things that lead Cholly to rape Pecola:

The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus.... He wanted to fuck her—tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her,

"I can't go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me."

"Help you how? Tell me. Don't be frightened."

"My eyes."

"What about your eyes?"

"I want them blue." (137-38)

Pecola's demand for the blue eyes seems fantastic to Mr. Soaphead, however, it is a pressing need on her part since she cannot attend school because of her ugliness. For the first time in the novel, she is articulating her desire to a white man. Her desire can never be fulfilled as it is beyond human capacity. Mr. Soaphead is unable to do it. He becomes successful only in making her believe that he has changed her eyes. Pecola fantasizes that her eyes are changed to blue and, as a result, other girls are jealous of her. She tells Claudia about her blue eyes.

Pecola falls prey to "the dominant culture's beauty standard" (Swain 91); it drives her inward bringing about the destruction and division of her person. The culture's beauty standards prevent her from locating beauty in her person that white girls may not have. She is never spared from the taunts to ponder over her own beauty. After her baby's death, people respond her with "gossip" and "the slow wagging of heads," and children "laughed out right" at her (Morrison 162). Pecola's insanity is the result of the white culture's forcing on the weak its standards of beauty on the one hand, and it is a critique of wrong notion of beauty on the other. The novel tells that the people forget the fact that her ugliness enhances their beauty and her presence confers on them many things. Claudia summarizes all those things:

We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. (163)

The blue-eyed Baby Doll represents the standards of white beauty and it is the same standards that Claudia challenges when she destroys it. In the destruction of the doll we see Claudia's anger is directed against white society and its standards of beauty. Richard Gray expresses it very clearly:

Claudia, the narrator, finds herself directed outward, to anger against white society: finding a convenient scapegoat, a focus for anger, for instance, in the 'white baby doll' she cuts up and destroys. (692)

A sense to understand things is the quality that Claudia displays in the course of the narrative. She knows that the so-called notion of 'cuteness' about the white girl makes the black girl lesser. She admits that to destroy the white doll is easier but to destroy the very notion of beauty is difficult. She sees the consent to the notion of beauty in "the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of...teachers" (Morrison 57). Claudia interrogates the white culture; she asks, "What did we lack?" and "Why was it important?" (57). Her questions are related to beauty that the culture has conferred on Maureen Peal. Claudia's say is that black girls love themselves and they are "comfortable" in their black skin. The white girl Maurine Peale is not an enemy to the black girls hence no need to fear her. But "*Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful" (58). The thing is the white culture that has made Maurine Peale beautiful ignoring outright the black girls. As the third person omniscient juvenile narrator Claudia's role in the novel is to present Pecola's story in a form made out of pieces of Pecola's life. Towards the end of the novel Claudia tells how she and her sister Frieda have collected the pieces of Pecola's story from the conversation of the people:

In the houses of people...we were asked to come in and sit... while we sat there...people continued their conversations.... Little by little we began to piece a story together, a secret, terrible, awful story...about Pecola. (148)

Claudia performs difficult task to structure Pecola's story and to share the secret of her life with the reader that otherwise would have remained a secret. She speaks for all the black