

TONI MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE AND SULA-A RACIAL SLUR

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Toni Morrison, while talking about her literary career she has stated: "I was interested in reading a kind of book that I had never read before. I didn't know if such a book existed, but I had just never read it in 1964 when I started writing *The Bluest Eye*." In another interview she has talked about *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* as follows: "I wrote *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* because they were books I had wanted to read. No one had written them yet, so I wrote them."

As already stated, black women have a unique place in American life and literature. Morrison knew this uniqueness. Hence she has stated "there is something inside [them] that makes [them] different from other people. It is not like men, and it is not like white women. We talked earlier about the relationship between my women and the men in their lives. When they sing in the blues it s one of those somebody is gone kind of thing but there is never any bitterness."

Being the most sensitive black woman writer, Toni Morrison has tried to highlight this kind of a dilemma of black woman in *The Bluest Eye*. The novel, *The Bluest Eye* indicates a black girl's quest to attain white standards. Morrison tells the story of a young black girl, Pecola Breedlove who wants to have blue eyes, a symbol of white beauty. Pecola believes that such eyes would make her beautiful, acceptable and admirable. However, her eyes cannot be changed into blue eyes in reality. She wants them desperately; as a result her quest for blue eyes culminates in madness.

Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel, searches painfully for self-esteem as a means of imposing order on the chaos of her world. Because a sense of self-worth and the correlative stability that would accompany it are unavailable to her in the familial or wider environment, she creates a subjective world of fantasy. Ironically named, the Breedloves do not give life to love: familiar, romantic, or personal. Pecola is loved neither by her parents, nor by friends nor by school teachers. She believes that if she has blue eyes she would be loved by all. She witnesses white children to be loved both by white and black adults. Hence she determines to achieve beauty and acceptance by acquiring blue eyes. The case of her quest for blue eyes is described thus:

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently,
For a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged,
She was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as
That happen would take a long, long time.

Basically, *The Bluest Eye* is a female Bildungsroman, a novel of growing up. The story depicts the two black families, the McTeers and the Breedloves, migrants from the South, living in Lorain, Ohio. But its emphasis is on the children, Claudia and Frieda, McTeer and Pecola Breedlove—their happy and painful experiences in growing up, and their formal and informal education that leads them to self understanding.

Pecola assigns her rejection by the society to the lack of blue eyes. She is so much obsessed with the blue eyes that she consoles herself by buying and eating her favorite candy, the Mary Jane with Mary Jane's picture on the wrapper that has white face, blonde hair, and blue eyes. She eats the candy because she believes that to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane, love Mary Jane, and be Mary Jane.

This symbolic cannibalism is a sign of Pecola's inner instability and madness. The desire for blue eyes is evidence of Pecola's frustration with her identity, with her world, and of her longing for herself. The desire for blue eyes is part of, as de Weever said, "Inverted Quality" of her world; in wanting blue eyes, Pecola wants, in fact, to be white.

The white community in the world of *The Bluest Eye* has little or nothing to do with Pecola. She is rejected out of hand. Naturally, in the end she goes mad. But Claudia by trying to gain maturity and understanding finally perceives the depth of her involvement in Pecola's descent into madness. Thus by providing two similar black female characters Morrison reveals how white Euro-centric standards play havoc with the

life of these girls. In addition to this, she also informs how critical and conscious black women can evade the extreme effects of the racism and sexism if they trust themselves.

In *Sula* Morrison depicts the quest of the protagonist, Sula, for creating her own self and coming to terms with her identity as a black female. Morrison demonstrates difficulties that black women face when they try to explore different aspects of their self. This theme is centered around a character called Sula who believes that she can create an identity for herself and that exists “beyond the community and social expectation.”

Toni Morrison creates an unusual world in this novel. The place where her characters live has unusual history to tell. Sula, her mother Hannah and grandmother Eva Peace live in a place called Bottom, in Medallion City, Ohio. This part of the city was ironically called Bottom, though it is up in the hills. It is the creation of a good white farmer. To begin with, a good white farmer promised freedom and a piece of bottom land to his slave if he would perform some very difficult chores. When the slave completed the work, he asked the farmer to keep his end of bargain. Freedom was easy; the farmer had no objection to that. But he did not want to give up any land. So he told the slave that he was very sorry that he had to give him valley land. He had hoped to give him a piece of the bottom. The slave blinked and said he thought valley land was bottom land. The master said “Oh, no! see those hills? That is bottom land, rich and fertile.” “But it is high up in the hills” said the slave. “High up from us,” said the master, “but when God looks down, it’s the bottom. That is why we call it so. It’s the bottom of heaven—best land there is. So the slave pressed his master to get him some. He preferred it to the valley. And it was done. The nigger got the hilly land, where planting was backbreaking, and the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter. This accounted for the fact that white people lived in the rich valley floor in that little river town Ohio, and the blacks populated the hills above it, taking small consolation in the fact that every day they could literally look down on the white folks. Sula lived in a place that has a history of this kind. Though there is no white character except Tarbaby In the novel, Bottom basically is a creation of the white master and it has its own influence on the lives of those who live in the Bottom.

Morrison brings out the predominant traits of Sula’s personality by providing readers with another character called Nel Wright. In fact, Sula and Nel are the two faces of the same coin. Morrison herself talked about Nel-Sula friendship which authenticates this statement. Many times Eva confuses Nel for Sula and Sula for Nel.

Naturally, in the company of each other they discover their own consciousness; start to learn who they are, and what they want to do individually and collectively. In the

company of each other they come over certain basic difficulties which they had experienced as young girls. Sula can solve the immediate problem, and they become “blood sisters”

In due course of time, they live in such a way that they appear to complement each other. Each other completes the incompleteness of the other’s personality. Neither one ever feels close to any person, nor neither any intimate human bonds to help shape her. Though their mothers and grandmother see that their physical needs are met, none cares or gives time to the girls’ emotional needs. Naturally they develop “spiritual bonds” with each other. However, their friendship does not last long.

The uniqueness of Sula-Nel friendship lies in their ability to transcend the difference in their family background and life styles to share a single vision. Nel represents the attitudes of the Bottom, her priorities are easily understood. She has devoted her life to Jude (her husband) and her children. Sula, however, is her own priority. No definable set of values has governed her behavior and hence she can be seen to represent the darker impulsive side of human nature. However, “she is the black woman whose power resides in her ability to seize control of her circumstances and create a universe suited to her changing needs”.

Certainly Sula has embraced the problematic part of her being but she has not moved beyond it. She rejects traditional ordering principles like marriage, children, grand parental care, and sexual mores, partially because of the restrictions they create. But rejection is an automatic response of rebellion. Morrison allows her readers to become aware of not only the different perceptions of values but also the motivations behind these values.

In this connection white has aptly stated: Sula is fundamentally a women’s novel. Even though a good deal of the action of the work derives from the consequences of male/female relationships, it is the self-perception of the woman and her subsequent reactions to self-concept that are the central issues of his novel. Sula becomes conscious of being a black female. Not only this but she also raises consciousness in the mind of Nel, her friend who believes that she is different, she is “me”. Sula understands that there is no love for the black women. Therefore, she must love herself and to attain the self love, she does what pleases her though she is discarded as a Pariah by the society. She comes to terms with herself and defies the male and white dominated social norms. Though she has to pay heavy cost, she tries to live up to the standards that she wants to create for herself. Hence here is a world that is based on black feminist consciousness.

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