



A STUDY OF TONI MORRISON'S NOVELS: THE BLUEST EYE

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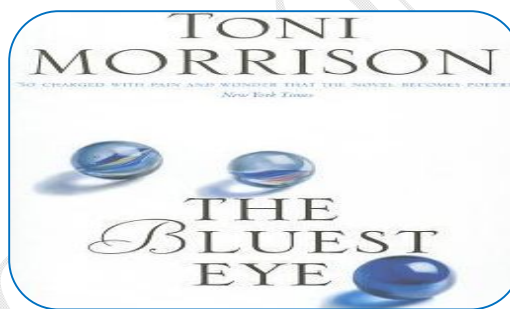
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ABSTRACT :

Eco feminist interpretation of tonimorrison's novels: The Bluest Eye. The present paper aims at the study of Toni Morrison's novels with an Eco Feministic approach. It is based on the study of novelthe 'Bluest Eye'. It shows how women and nature are related to each other and how both are oppressed by the patriarchal society in the same way and how women and nature both are showing resistance towards this dominance in their own ways. They are system of societal and psychological restrictions that have critically affected the lives of blacks in general and African Americans in Particular. This paper examines all the female characters in these novels are related and affected by nature in one or other ways. This oppression is still there in the contemporary period.



KEYWORDS : Toni Morrisons, Novel, The Blue Eye.

INTRODUCTION:

Morrison gives the image of a bird, a meaning that operates in two opposite directions. In the novels chosen for this study: *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison demonstrates that 'self' is always and forever inextricably linked to the community. The characters portrayed are examined within the context of their families, their communities. Their shortcomings or stigma rarely stem from their biological nature. They are the product of a society, a culture and they are shaped by various forces that come to surface as a result of the social dynamics. To use a literary history terminology, the four novels bear a heavy load of naturalistic signs that show environmental locations and heredity, the African American experience as central features in the shaping of characters' backgrounds.

The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison's first novel published in 1970, recounts the adventures of three young girls: Pecola Breedlove, Claudia, and Frieda McTeer. It examines racism, sexuality, and what it means to grow up in a hostile world. Although the past is not openly addressed as it will be in the following novels, Claudia's retrospective narrative of her childhood describes a world where «adults do not talk to us- they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information». Claudia's narrative in the first chapter of *The Bluest Eye* conveys her reminiscences, as a child, of her social environment. We are likely to be here in an African context, if not one which Africa has tremendously influenced. The importance attached to age as an agency for privileges is here an indication that Claudia McTeer's upbringing followed African roles. In fact, what appears clearly here is the split between the adult world and that of the children resulting in a lack of love that is going to affect Claudia in the course of her emotional development.

Even though the first part of *The Bluest Eye* focuses on language with a primer that is getting more and more difficult to understand, thus reflecting young Pecola's warped sense of herself and of

her community, we however discover that Ohio is the locality where the story develops. There is obviously no surprise as Toni Morrison portrays people she has lived with in an environment that she knows very well:

*Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, Jane live in the -green-and white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress.*⁷

What catches the eye in this environment is about colors. Green, white, and red even though they may have significance in Pecola's mind, they don't seem to match and obviously contrast with the sense of beauty expressed in the fourth sentence. What appears in the description of this site is the negative image it conveys. The young girl who is growing in that perception draws on the Yoruba cosmogony, especially the «*egungun*»¹ which makes the worlds of the living and the dead interfere constantly. The belief that the dead protect the community is explicitly shown in Morrison's works. This explains why she is sympathetic to certain characters, Pilate for example in *Song of Solomon*, a woman of knowledge because she can read the past and believes in those values. Pilate is the depository of traditions. Sethe is also another character recounting her «rememorizes» in the form of songs, made-up ballads for her children. Those songs, in fact, constitute a transmission of history and of culture. In Pilate's conversation, even her thoughts, everything comes out with a certain musicality. However, Sethe embodies another myth one can connect to the Yoruba cosmogony: the *Abiku* Child Myth. The best illustration of that myth can be found in the novel of a young Nigerian novelist: Ben Okri. In his novel, *The Famished Road*,² published in 1991, the main character AZARO is an *Abiku*³, a child torn between the spiritual and the natural worlds. There is a belief that spirits compete with human beings for babies. A death at an early age is the sign that the spirit took advantage of a mother's carelessness to take away her baby. Paradoxically, to ensure life to the baby, a sort of game is played against the spirit through the name given at the birth of the child. Names used in that context, in the Senegalese one in particular, could have special meaning such as "rags", "Nobody loves" etc ... Those names will result in the spirit's loss of interest in the dispute over the child. Consequently the baby is expected to survive. In *Beloved*, Sethe feels that some fragments of repression are connected to the presence of her child who died before she was 2 years old. That death is seen as the punishment of her forgetfulness. Hence, she actively denies life and memory in the hope that death will not intrude again. There is no doubt that Sethe finds herself in a context that has been influenced by African beliefs.

The presence of Africa is fully justified by the strong ties Toni Morrison has with her community. Her works seem to address the lives of African American people in different historical periods. Toni Morrison sees herself as an agent in the empowerment of her people through the rediscovery of their history. Therefore, no doubt, that her focus be historic and her goal the rediscovery of her African past, lost through slavery and perhaps irretrievable except as she does, through myths and then only at the risk: of life and sanity. However, in examining her legacy, she expects to reach a higher level in the understanding of herself. Her themes, in that regard, are no longer specific to herself or to her group, but they have become universal ones. In fact, they address disruptive families and challenge modern times, the more so because of the growing interest in social mobility and family ties which does not imply love and forgiveness as cornerstones of communal life.

Her interest in Africa is also her commitment to the feminine cause. Women must have a better understanding of the new challenges and work toward their participation in social dynamic processes. Toni Morrison works for freedom and it is important to note that the story of an ancestor who could fly, who would be beyond social impediment and limitations reflects her own impulses as she sees herself moving away from restrictive spaces and ready to act on circumstances.

Her link with Africa, as revealed by the connections we have already mentioned, results from her early exposure to the literature from that continent. She read CamaraLaye, Chicaya U. Tamsi. She dreamed of the day Leopold Sedar Senghor would read her books which was likely to have come true given the interest Senghor had in the African American experience. She is impressed by Chinua Achebe with whom she shares similar approaches when revisiting the African past, the disruptive forces of domination and identity transformation. Yet, Toni Morrison has never tried to visit the continent of her

origins. It is not a question of means or opportunities. At a conference she attended in 1956 in France at the Sorbonne about black culture she disclosed her lack of interest in visiting Africa. Expressing her views through her works, one can see the point she is trying to make. The most vivid link with Africa is Jazz, that music which today knows no boundaries, that music which speaks to the heart of every one and yet is so authentically black, that music which narrates 300 years of sufferings with notes which know how to restore hope to the dispossessed or the social outcast, how to arrange words to make them look beautiful, feel beautiful and poetic. This is certainly the message Toni Morrison wanted to find in Africa, values which are like Jazz, universal and yet so authentic and race specific, formerly scorned, once seen as low culture, landmark in Black heritage but today valued, reclaimed by so many social categories, ethnicities, and raised to the status of an academic subject in most American universities and sign of refinement for many circles of intellectuals and artists.

It can be inferred that Toni Morrison begins the search for her heritage by addressing what is most intimate and meaningful to her- the black family- and broadens her scope to embrace the black community at large, then regions of the United States, foreign lands and alien cultures, history and reality. Each novel moves forward to a new concern, but without having completely left behind previous ones. Her strong stands against light-skinned characters and culturally alienated ones seem to have softened. She has gone from, as it appears in her first novels, such invectives as the origins of a mule and a mulatto are the same to the treatment of interracial skin color in *Jazz* where she avoids the earlier tendencies just valorizing the black-black woman over the light-skinned one. The novel *Jazz* is illustrative of that subtle change in Toni Morrison's views on cultural alienation in the African American society. Though Dorcas' light skin is not to blame for Joe Trace's infidelity, Violet's own obsession with whiteness becomes a barrier to understanding her husband's more complex need for renewal, for remembering «*the way it was when he and Violet were young*»⁴, and for self-determination. The ambiguity of Toni Morrison's positions concerning race and identity incorporates the place she gives to the family. The concern of Toni Morrison is to show the need for family and community to nurture and sustain the individual. Yet, a look at her novels reveals that the families she portrays, most of which being nuclear families, are in complete disintegration. From *The Bluest Eye* to *Song of Solomon*, family structures are totally disrupted: the Mac Teers are impoverished, the Wrights are sterile, the Streets are decadent, the Deads are just as their name suggests, therefore dead. Even though Morrison does not see men who abandon their families as villainous, she, however, strives to show how their absence causes chaos and confusion to women and children. The context of the family she describes results from a historical situation where men are denied access to jobs, therefore denied to be as they used to be in Africa, providers and breadwinners. This explains why the African American men can't any longer claim to be heads of their households. In *Beloved* and in *Jazz*, the families are so dysfunctional that they literally cease to exist. This does not mean that Morrison does not believe in the power of regeneration of the Black family.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline finds her life miserable because her husband Cholly is incorrigible. She considers herself as a Christian woman. She would like to punish Cholly. She is not interested in Christ the Redeemer, but rather Christ the Judge. Thus Morrison symbolizes Pauline as Christ who passes judgement on Cholly, the sinner.

The birthmarks carry both negative and positive connotations in Morrison's novels. For Sula, the birthmark, a scar over her eye is a symbol of evil. The inhabitants of the Bottom treat Sula's birthmark as an indication of other-worldliness. Because of this scar she is looked upon as a witch.

But in Dorcas' case, the birthmark, little half -moons under her cheek bones are like faint hoof marks becoming a trace and Joe feels that without those tracks he would be lost. Joe is proud that he traced his mother and tracked Dorcas.

Toni Morrison is the first African-American novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 for "Beloved". Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogue, and richly detailed characters. She is an American novelist, editor and professor. She wrote ten novels. Among her best known novels are "The Bluest Eye". In 2012, an interview in The Guardian, she tells that she became a Catholic at age 12 and received the baptismal name "Anthony", which later became the basis for her

nickname "Toni". She did her post-graduation in English from Cornell University in 1955, for which she wrote a thesis on suicide in the works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. Morrison began writing fiction as part of an informal group of poets and writers at Howard who met to discuss their work. She wrote a short story about a black girl who longed to have blue eyes. She later developed the story as her first novel, "The Bluest Eye" (1970). She wrote ten novels, the latest one is "Home" (2012). She also wrote for Children's literature as well. In contemporary woman novelists of America, Toni Morrison is the rare one who thinks highly of nature in her works. As the emerging of eco-feminism, some studier began to research these novels in terms of eco-feminist Critics. However, the quantities of these studies were small. Eco-criticism has become one of the fastest-growing and promising areas in literary study and a "self-conscious enterprise", after a slow start in the early 1990s. Eco-feminism describes movements and philosophies that link feminism with ecology. As the environmental movement along with environmental crises raised the consciousness of women to the decay of the earth, they began to see a parallel between the devaluation of the earth and the devaluation of the women. Women began to see the link as not a false construction of weakness, but as a strong unifying force that clarified the violation of women and the earth as part of the same drama of male control. In a book on eco-feminism, "Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Eco-feminism" (1990), Diamond and Orenstein claim eco-feminism is a social movement and offer the book as a statement of its ideology (p.xiii). The concept of eco-feminism uses the age-old connection between women and nature as a bridge to strengthen both the feminism and the ecological movements which seek to end the oppression of Women and Nature. Eco-feminism calls for an end to all oppressions. Eco-feminism connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment, and argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal Western society. Thinkers like Linda Vance argue that eco-feminism must re-conceptualize the relationship of Woman and Nature as "sisters" based on shared oppression of the Woman and the non-human world. Both Nature and Women are important themes in Toni Morrison's novels which provide the appropriateness of applying this theory to her novels. "The bluest eye" is her first novel and usually studied in terms of Psychoanalytic Critics, Postcolonial Critics and Feminist Critics According to data collection, this research was worth doing. Moreover, this novel could largely represent theories of eco-feminism and the early thoughts of Toni Morrison. Cultural eco-feminism has been analyzed through the illustration of rape, menstruation and natural images in the novel. These illustrations emphasize women's femininity and the connections with nature. Through the kitchen in which the story takes place and the description of housework, the concept of social eco-feminism can be seen.

Social eco-feminists insist that women are close to nature through their long-time social roles which are pregnancy, giving birth, raising children and doing housework. Vandana Shiva describes Eco-feminism by saying that it is the "medicalisation of childbirth and industrialization of plant reproduction". Natural imagery in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" compares women destiny with nature, and uncovers the double pressures from white culture and men suffered by Negro women, criticizing ruling logic which gives oppression to Negro women and nature. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison offers a profound critique of codified and institutionalized white language and ideology through the subversion of a school primer that privileges whiteness. The black family and community play a very important and dominating role in the black individual's life. Because of the lack of parents' love and irresponsibility of the community, Pecolaloses her sanity, while with the love of their parents and the support from their family, Claudia and her sister Frieda grow up healthily. In "The Bluest Eye", the black culture is potrayed mainly through the black blues and Aunt Jimmy's funeral. In "The Bluest Eye" Morrison is specifically connected with a particularly impalpable form of racist ideology that, because of its indefinable nature, is paradoxically more pervasive, psychologically damaging and difficult to contest than extreme and overt forms of racism. When Cholly Breedlove reduces his family to a state of homelessness, puts them all 'outdoors', Claudia, the now mature narrator, reflects upon her new awareness of the social, psychological and economic constraints on the black community. This novel very beautifully depicts the comparison, relation, and state of Nature and Women. The novel is divided into the four seasons, but it pointedly refuses to meet the expectations of these seasons. For example,

spring, the traditional time of rebirth and renewal, of new lights, colors and new ways reminds Claudia of being whipped with new switches, and it is the season when Pecola is raped. Pecola's baby dies in autumn, the season of harvesting. Morrison uses natural cycles to underline the unnaturalness and misery of her characters', especially female characters experiences. To some degree, she also questions the benevolence of nature, as when Claudia wonders whether; "The earth itself might have been unyielding", to someone like Pecola. Example of marigolds is also used by Morrison when Claudia and Frieda associate marigolds with the safety and well-being of Pecola's baby. Their ceremonial offering of money and the remaining unsold marigold seeds represents an honest sacrifice on their part. They believe that if the marigolds they have planted grow, then Pecola's baby will be all right. More generally, marigolds represent the constant renewal of nature. In Pecola's case, this cycle of renewal is perverted by her father's rape of her. "Sula" is her second novel and the best to represent her writing style and technique. Through the narration of the fates of two typical black women Sula, and Nel, the novel demonstrates under the triple oppression of sexism, racialism and classism black women have experienced great hardships and misery in the process of searching for identity and struggling for freedom and equality. Sula and Nel are two Black young girls: clever and poor, together they grow up sharing their secrets, dreams and happiness. Then Sula moves away from the small-town community in the uplands of Ohio to roam the cities of America. Much has changed in the town when she returned ten years later, including Nel, who now has a husband and three children. The bottom is mostly the black community, situated in the hills above the mostly whites, the wealthier community of medallion. The Nature is being described very frequently in the novel. When Sula died, there is one more death, of nature, the Bottoms; a small hill is being transformed into a golf course by the Medallions. The nature is also seen as a destroyer when Nel says: "*The river had killed them all. No more silver-gray flashes, no more flat, wide, unhurried look. No more slowing down of gills...*" (pg174). Morrison shattered the stereotypical image of black women and addresses her with strength, wisdom, and rebellious spirit of exploring themselves. There is an extrinsic relation and comparison between nature and female characters shown by the author. Birds, flowers, fire and most importantly water is very much associated with sula and other characters as well. Birds invoke the idea of flight, which makes sense when we consider that Cecile and Sula both flee at some point in the story. When we meet Rochelle, she wears a "canary-yellow dress" and has the "glare of a canary". And we already know that a "plague of robins" arrives in Medallion just before Sula goes and robins are often associated with the spring, the season of rebirth and growth. Sula has a birthmark shaped like a rose, and "The Rose Tattoo" is the source of the novel's epigraph. These particular flowers are beautiful and fragrant, even intoxicating. Rochelle intoxicates the young Nel, and Sula intoxicates the many men around her. These characters are also a little dangerous in that they disrupt the lives of the people they encounter. But the thing about flowers is, once they're picked, they don't live for very long. Just as the flower's beauty is fleeting, so too is the presence of both of these women in the novel. Water is often associated with death in the novel. For Sula (and Nel, to a lesser degree), it represents Chicken's horrible drowning. Fire might be a cleansing force, but water engulfs and consumes the young boy. Water doesn't comfort Sula but rather agitates and upsets her because of her responsibility for Chicken's death. At the end of the novel, one of the townspeople who die in the tunnel slides and hits the ice below.

CONCLUSION:-

The Bluest Eye is the most impressive novel among other novels of Toni Morrison. *The Bluest Eye* is an artistic portrayal of a girl's life struggling to find her way in a white world. She was a lonely black girl who is yearning for blue eyes. She thinks that blue eyes make her family and friends love her. She suffers in every way, physically and mentally. Eco-feminists talk about the relation of women and nature. Environment of the nature is being degraded in the novels. Based on the above research achievements and limitations, this proposal is based on a tentative reading of "The bluest eye" from the eco-feminist perspective to show Morrison's eco-feminist consciousness and explore the deep literary value of the novels. The thesis attempts to deepen the understanding of the novels further by reading it from the new perspective of eco-feminism.

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