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NEGITUDE IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

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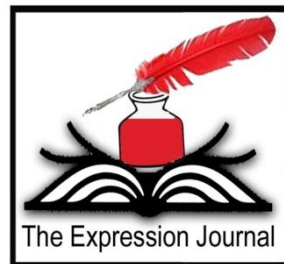
Abstract

Toni Morrison's debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*, presents a powerful portrayal of the theme of Negritude in African American literature. Negritude is a cultural and political movement that originated in the 1930s among black intellectuals in Paris, which aimed to celebrate blackness, African heritage, and reclaiming black identity. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison addresses the issue of internalized racism and self-hatred within the black community, a pervasive problem that stems from the legacy of slavery and racism. The novel centers on the character of Pecola, a young black girl who longs for blue eyes and believes that having them will grant her acceptance and love from society. Morrison uses Pecola's story to explore the destructive impact of white beauty standards on black identity and self-esteem. Pecola's desire for blue eyes is a metaphor for the internalized racism and self-hatred that many African Americans experience as a result of centuries of oppression and marginalization. Morrison's exploration of Negritude in *The Bluest Eye* is a powerful statement of black identity and culture. She challenges the dominant cultural narrative that perpetuates the idea of white superiority and black inferiority. By examining the psychological and emotional consequences of racism and discrimination, Morrison exposes the damage that it inflicts on black individuals and communities. Thus, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a significant work of African American literature that explores the theme of Negritude in a powerful and thought-provoking way. Morrison's portrayal of internalized racism and self-hatred within the black community serves as a call to action for African Americans to embrace their cultural heritage and celebrate their blackness. Her work is a testament to the resilience and courage of African Americans in the face of oppression and discrimination.

Keywords

Identity Crisis, Racism, Negritude, Pecola, Black and White.

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Introduction

Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize winning African-American woman writer, professor, and teacher, is known for her fearless and powerful writing. She fearlessly raised her voice against injustice. *The Bluest Eye* is her first work and racism is the prominent theme of the novel. Morrison was very clear to choose her protagonist as well as other characters, mostly her central character is women where story revolve around. Morrison's intention was to awaken readers to the backdrop of African-American literature. Her stories were unique, and their impact went beyond what was included in her books. Many other writers were inspired by Morrison's compelling and bold novels about black history and its identity crisis, certainly entering a forbidden field. Morrison's books cry out for the revolutionary issues of racial justice and civil rights. Toni Morrison frequently combines many essences in her writing. She was impacted by how black people are treated by all other races since she is an African American lady who lives in the current and postmodern period. Black people were consistently subjected to abuse, especially at the hands of white people who never missed an occasion to demean them and repeatedly inform them that blacks had no business being in the United States. *The Bluest Eye* is one of them directly targeted the evil issue of racism. Morrison uses the complexity of individual psyche to connect the reader with the actual pain and suffering.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* poignantly illustrates the hardships and stereotypes that all people with dark skin endured throughout their lives. The main characters in the stories overcome conventional barriers to appreciate the aesthetics and beauty of their own culture. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is not at all bothered by how her black body is changed to fit in the stereotype of white-skinned, blue-eyed beauty. Rather, she is interested in the method of appreciating beauty. She believes that this is the only way to be accepted with love by her family.

What is Negritude?

Negritude is derived from the word Negro, which historically referred to black people, particularly those who lived under colonial rule. It equally applied to all Africans, wherever

they may have lived. However, overtime the term separated itself from Africans living on the continent and remained a derisive (derogatory term) term for Africans who had acquired citizenship in the west, particularly. The United States of America is home to many generations of Africans who were brought over in the transatlantic slave trade, either through migration or ancestry. In order to promote and cultivate "Black Consciousness" throughout Africa and its emigrant, francophone, intellectuals, writers and politician of the African Diaspora created the framework criticism as Negritude in 1930. Domestic issues, such as physical and mental illnesses, can also be detrimental.

The concept of negritude was defined differently by various scholars and literary figures, each bringing their own perspective to understanding the assumed role of negritude. One of the founders of the movement, Aimé Césaire, sees negritude as the consciousness of being Black, a realization that translates directly into a Black person's acceptance and assertion of their own destiny and culture (Campbell, 2006). Campbell summarizes the concept as a philosophical movement to revitalize Black pride. He asserts that Pan-Africanism, a related ideology, is often cited as a source for the concept of Negritude. He acknowledges that the most popular interpretation of Negritude was developed in the 1930s by a trio of African diaspora citizens living in France: Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, and Léopold Senghor, Campbell (2006) speculates that the actual concept of Negritude may have originated with Edward W. Blyden.

African people in all parts of the world to reclaim their African heritage and thereby regain their pride" Senghor, another founder of Negritude, describes the term simply as a collection of African cultural values (Mabana, 2006). He asserts that Negritude is actually a culture. It is a compilation of the economic, political, intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and social values of Africans and Black minorities in the Americas, Asia, and Oceania (Mabana, 2006). The concept of including Black people from around the world is consistent with the common struggle of people of African descent in all societies where they have experienced racial oppression and other types of oppression.

Fanon claims that a black child who grows up in a typical family may develop abnormal tendencies upon encountering white culture. And if the child is mistreated in his or her family then it gets worse. So the familial environment is the root cause of mental illness. Negrophobia can stem from both interactions with white people and an attempt to escape from blackness, while Negritude may either be underdeveloped or fragmented. As Fanon says:

When the Negro Makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an actionable person. The goal of his behavior will be the other (in the guise of the white man). For the other alone can give him worth. That is on ethical level: self esteem (119)

As a result, the black identity is aware of its inferiority (116), and as a result of being subject of black inferiority and white dominance, the black identity experiences "an ambiguity that is immensely neurotic (148).

Negritude is both the most prominent contemporary manifestation of an African crisis of conscience and the turning point in the development of a contemporary African consciousness. The symbolic and intellectual aspects of the same historical, social, and cultural inspiration are represented by African "messianism" and Negritude. Their forms have changed. Despite borrowing from Western religion only to the extent that it fits in, tradition still serves as the basis for social behaviour in African messianism. Negritude, on the other hand, is strictly rational and advocates a non-rational culture. Thus, Senghor's Negritude is an intellectualism

mediated by the intellect, and the entire movement is represented by a Western form that assimilates African reality. Negritude is essentially an escape from tradition; although it has an African focus, its formal expression is Western. The movement thus heralds a shift in the nature of collective expression in Africa - away from the millennial myth and religious undercurrent that traditional Africa had relied on for human achievement, and toward a lay, intellectually oriented perspective on the world that is a legacy of the European Renaissance. It signifies the "desacralization" of African communal life, the emergence of new currents of thought to address contemporary African issues that are spontaneous rather than forced.

Negritude in *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is the story about an adolescent girl child Pecola Breedlove who lives with her family. But her life is filled with pessimism, neither easy at outside nor even at home. She was used to see her parents Cholly and Pauline fighting. She doesn't have friends she was only subject of mockery. Not a single ray of positivity is present there in her life. Things were getting worst day by day until Pecola had no self esteem left. She was obsessed to fit in beauty standard and for that she longed for blue eyes every day. As she is aware of society's set beauty standards, which include pale 'white skin' and a pair of 'blue eyes', she knows that she doesn't fit in at all. She prays obsessively but nothing changed in her life.

Morrison had woven Pecola's character not to entertain her readers, but to make them to feel the pain and suffering of racial crisis. The whole novel continues with the miserable circumstances around Pecola. As a pessimistic child, Pecola had lost her mental balance and created her own imaginary world where she fits perfectly. There, only she will be accepted, loved, and live life to the fullest like whites. She lost the control of her mind because of her unpleasant experiences during her childhood. Pecola was frequently reminded of her "ugly" appearance by those around her. Pecola then began to believe that blue eyes would enhance her beauty. She wished for blue eyes even though she knew she couldn't change her skin colour. she hopes that she can at least change her eye color, which will help her conform to Western prejudices. In one instance, Claudia is seen destroying her white dolls because she hates whites, which is in complete contradiction to Pecola's desire for white beauty. This is due to the fact that Claudia grew up in a safe environment where she learned the value of her own self.

Morrison raises her voice against cultural racism legacy and negritude through Pecola. Although Pecola couldn't fight for herself to achieve any good. But the aim was fulfilled to show how societal evil and discrimination cause the loss of adolescent identity. Not only Pecola, but her whole family lacks self esteem and love. So they are unable to nurture Pecola because they also are the victim of society. Racism is passed down from generation to generation and they are part of it. Blacks and whites are divided in two groups and in every action white people are superior and ruling power. Morrison's characters are screamed for their pain and suffering, although they didn't find any solution. Morrison's clear aim was to highlight a problem, and it is essential to know the reason for a solution, which she did very well. Toni Morrison reveals the history the culture of African American people. She wants to make people aware of injustice, discrimination and power of European in Black community. And negritude plays very a very important role in her works, especially in *The Bluest Eye*.

Black people are taught that their culture is inferior to that of whites. The dualistic nature of black consciousness is the result of such brainwashing. Dubey refers to this dual consciousness as "double consciousness" in his book *The Soul of Black Folk*. "It's a strange feeling, the double consciousness, this feeling of always being there," he asserts.

The act of measuring one's soul by the standards of a world that "observes with amused contempt and pity" (1975: 14) is to see oneself through the eyes of others. The victim of this cultural disease lives in two opposing worlds and undergoes a psychological struggle. Pecola is an example of this phenomenon. She is convinced that the Breedloves, because they are black, flawed, spoiled, and imperfect people, do not receive the respect they deserve. Therefore, it is a challenge to gain equal access to existing social systems. In order to actually influence the brains of the black race, the white race imposes its culture on them. The book's narrator, Claudia, is aware of this situation: "It was as if a mysterious, omniscient master had given each of them a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they were all enclosed in it," she says. Everyone did so without hesitation. Their psyche was used to the behavior of suffering, so they accept the master slave tradition. "You're ugly people," the instructor had said they looked around but could find nothing to refute this claim (Morrison, 2004: 39).

Here, the master represents white dominance, which gives blacks a sense of ugly inferiority. This sense of ugliness, Pecola is affected by the trait she inherited from her mother. For Pecola and her family, the feeling of being ugly is a personal belief introduced and voluntarily adopted by her white superiors. Pecola's ugly ego and physique envelop her like a insane.

Her confused mentality is unable to understand her in valuing herself. "Behind hers, she hid, concealed, caged, and eclipsed-rarely emerging from the shroud, and then only to long for her mask to come back" (Morrison, 2004: 39). In Foucault's terminology, the sensation of ugly can be read as speech; it is the covert processes disguised by the outward objectivity of its component words and phrases. Pecola experiences an identity crisis, which Deleuz also mentions, and is evidenced by her apocalyptic longing for blue eyes. The other limiting features of her vulnerable status at the bottom of the social scale are confirmed by her utter blackness. Pecola is essentially a victim of a white civilization that discriminates against people on the basis of race of a culture that instills in her the notion that she is unattractive because she does not conform to Western ideals, norms, and ideas of beauty. Pecola's fate, according to Barbara Christian (1989: 153), is ultimately determined by the illusion of virtue and beauty imposed by one culture on another. Pecola allows herself to be duped by her gullibility into believing that the white beauty myth is a suitable means of self-definition and self-affirmation. In reality, she is hated, despised, and shunned by her professors, classmates, and everyone around her. For this reason she adopts white beauty standards to achieve "the blackest eye," the ultimate beauty standard, which devalues her healthy self. Blond hair, white skin, and blue eyes are the cornerstones of the "white American recipe for beauty" (Otten, 1993: 17-18).

In "Behind the Making of the Black Book", Morrison asserts that

the concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest, most pernicious and destructive ideas of the western world and we should have nothing to do with it. Physical beauty has nothing to do with our past, present, or future. Its absence or presence was only important to 'them', the white people who used it for anything they wanted. (1974: 89)

Here Morrison exposes her critique of the norms of white culture. She claims that "romantic love" and "the idea of physical beauty" are two of "probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought" (Morrison, 2004: 111). She criticizes black people who are influenced by white people and culture. In Western discourse, outer beauty is associated with inner righteousness and virtue.

Conclusion

Pecola suffers at the hands of her own people in addition to white people. The black spectrum includes intra racism, at school, her teachers and her and peers tease her for having dark skin, people points at her to show inferiority, she is the outcast of her community. Black people end up hurting their own race rather than cherish it. It may be argued that Pecola's alienation from her family and community is exacerbated by the tense scenario and results in her unfortunate circumstances. Because of the inferiority complex that society has projected onto them, they undergo existential crises, feel alienated, and long for freedom. Morrison emphasised in *The Bluest Eye* and other writings that the key to true freedom is to accept oneself as one is. There is no need to maintain the appearance of Western elegance and beauty, nor is there any need to change. One can free oneself from the cursed chains of the world by loving oneself. Carelessness is a central theme in all of her writing. But Morrison has managed, in her writing career, to expose the horrors that people can do to each other.

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