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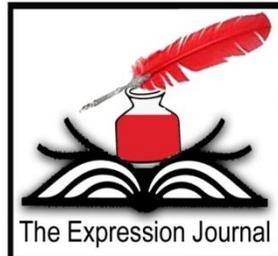
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## THE TEXT OF THE DICK AND JANE PRIMER IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE*

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### Abstract

Toni Morrison is an American novelist, editor and Professor at Princeton University in New Jersey. She is so well known in the African American literature that without her the readers feel that they are missing something very important in the African American Literature. She is a feminist writer who has written her novels on the women and their problems in the patriarchal society where race also plays a significant role. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, a black girl, Pecola always dreams to have blue eyes and fair complexion so that she may also look beautiful like other white girls. She becomes a rape victim also. In fact rape is a dominant theme in African American literature and Alice Malsenior Walker's novels also depict the same theme apart from many others. Morrison has won the the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 and in the same year, she has been awarded the American Book Award for her novel *Beloved*. Later this novel was adapted into a movie also in 1998. Morrison has received the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for her remarkable contribution and her Achievement in American fiction. Present paper analyses the text of Dick and Jane Primer in her novel *The Bluest Eye*.

### Key-Words

African American Literature, Text, Dick, Jane Primer, Race, Ethnicity, Morrison.

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Vol. 3 Issue 3 (June 2017)

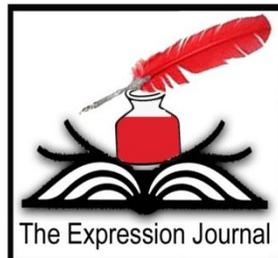
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From *Clotel* (1853) to *Paradise* (1998), the journey of African-American novel and its history has been a fascinating one. Moving progressively away from the writing of slave narratives to the writing of novels, the African-American novel was capable of representing the broadest human concerns, it could absorb multiple forms of expressive culture, and it could engage readers across economic and racial lines.

If the Civil Rights Movement provided a catalyst for the novel in the social and political realm, the demise of New Criticism and the democratization of the academy helped its rebirth. The New Critics had eschewed any kind of political intent in art, calling for autonomy of art divorced from politics. These critics had countered what they saw as the decline of serious literary art in the 1930s, laying the basis for how subsequent generations would read and interpret literature. African-American novelists would remain imprisoned by these paradigms just as they were imprisoned by the racial climate of America. The rise of the Black Studies, on the other hand, put an academic face on the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and forced reconsiderations of scholarship, bringing a new generation of black intellectuals to the fore. An increase in cultural production became one of the byproducts of the resurgence of interest in African-American life and culture after the 1960s. African-American novelists responded to these developments with a virtual explosion of literary talent. In 1970 alone, more than twenty-five African-American novels appeared including the first novels by Sharon Bell Mathis, Louise Meriweather, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Al Young.

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Today, not only are African-American novelists widely recognized and revered, but they also claim a significant share of the world's highest literary prizes and awards. This recognition and the great achievement of African-American writers, William Andrews convincingly argues, have "had a salutary effect on the black community's sense of its own literary resources and on the white literate community's sense of the importance of those resources." One such literary resource under discussion is the Nobel laureate Toni Morrison.

Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Her mother's family had come to Ohio from Alabama via Kentucky, and her father had migrated from Georgia. She grew up in a working class neighborhood that provided the setting for her early novels. She attended Howard University and earned a B.A. in English in 1953; she earned a master's degree in English from Cornell University in 1955. She married Harold Morrison, an architect and had two sons before separating in 1964. From 1955 onwards, Morrison has held a series of academic appointments. Currently she is a Professor at Princeton University. While working as an editor at Random House, she published her first Novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970); its vivid language and frank depiction of the experiences of African-American women are characteristic of all of Morrison's fiction. Her second novel *Sula* (1973) intertwines the story of the friendship between two women with that of the breakdown of their community. *Song of Solomon* (1977) became a best-seller, as did *Tar Baby* (1987), a haunting novel about slavery, motherhood, and the effect of the past on the present. In 1992, she published her sixth novel, *Jazz*, as well as a collection of essays, *playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. In 1993, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Her seventh novel *Paradise* (1997) brackets the stories of a community of unconventional women with an account of their destruction by a group of men from a small black town in Oklahoma. Her recent work is *A Mercy*.

Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* is in Morrison's own words about "the damage that internalized racism can do to the most vulnerable members of the community, a young girl." It is about how influential society can be on an individual and how strongly its ideas are impressed upon that individual. The idea in the *Bluest Eye* pertains to physical beauty and how the idea of beauty can turn someone's life upside down. It has to be remembered that Pecola to like and to be like the Shirley Temples and Mary Jane's which the society loves and adores. The results is-

"Each night, without fail, she (Pecola) prayed for Blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time. Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people (35).

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*The Bluest Eye* is a remarkable work because it perfectly blends 'aesthetics with ideology'. It fully supports the author's view that how a novel can be "unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful". More important is the way the novel unfolds or the way it gets told than what the novel is about.

Morrison begins the novel with the epigraphical introduction, a quotation from the Dick and Jane primer.

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 and Jane

Live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy.....

The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play Jane play.

The text of the Dick and Jane primer is rendered by Morrison in three versions. In the first version, no problem surfaces as sentences have order, words are properly spaced. In the second version the sentences lack punctuation ('stopping and pausing'). And in the third version things go haywire- no gaps between words, all black.

If the *Bluest Eye* attempts to make a statement about the damage that internalized racism can do to the most vulnerable members of a community, then the three different versions of the Dick and Jane primer can be seen as a slow but steady process of internalizing the dominant discourse. The first version, the perfectly ordered one will be the ideal on the standard that society accepts and upholds. If you want to be happy and accepted, you need to be like the beautiful Jane (blue-eyed, white), you need to have as lovely a house as lovely a house and parents as Dick and Jane do. The difference between the world of Dick and Jane and the world of Pecola operates as text and countertext and vice versa.

In the second version, the process of internalization becomes evident. Remember, there is no stopping and pausing throughout this paragraph. Once you start internalizing the dominant discourse there is no stopping and pausing. Claudia, though seems to be the least affected by the "Shirley Temples of the world," she herself admits that after a certain stage she has to learn to worship her. Whiter-worship is imminent even for Claudia-"I learned much later to love her (Shirley Temple). So, once the process of internalizing begins there is no way to stop it just as how the sentence runs without punctuations.

The third version is completely orderless with no spaces, no gaps, no stopping and pausing and everything necessarily black. Once the internalization process reaches its peak life becomes orderless just as the primer. In the novel once Pecola's fascination and longing for the blue eyes reaches its highest possible stage, she goes insane. The tragedy is intensified because we as a reader are aware that there is no looking back for Pecola even if she wants to and also we know that this is not the end of her tragedy- the worst is still to come, as foretold by the lack of gap or space (no looking back) and lack of punctuation (the tragedy continues). Also we could place the various characters of the novel to the three

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versions of the primer. Claudia and Freida belong to the second (and even Pauline and Geraldine to certain extent). Pecola stands isolated in the third primer the same way she gets isolated from the society towards the end. In a way the text (the story of Pecola) subverts or deconstructs the story of Dick and Jane-the dominant discourse.

Another way of looking at the primer and the novel is to follow Morrison's own view. In *Rootedness: the Ancestor as Foundation* she observes- "I have to provide the places and spaces so that the reader can participate". In *The Bluest Eye* she actually focuses the reader on the domestic spaces as represented in an elementary primer. The meaning of house and home circulates throughout all of her novels, but in *The Bluest Eyes* the house has some particular meanings that foreshadow the story inside the body of the novel. First, it frames the story of how racial difference affects the social dynamics of the community where the Macteers and Breedloves live. Most readers recall Dick and Jane primer with pictures of blond haired white people and no pictures of color whatsoever. The novel can be read as an exploration of the psychic consequence, particularly for black girls, of being marginalized, not only in the earlier text books used in elementary schools, but also in their everyday lives, both in and outside schools. The reference to house and home in the opening passage inscribe, through the literal spacing the words on the page, the ways in which language shapes, mirrors and defies reality. Third reference to house and home in *The Bluest Eye* focus on the space in which a black girl's identity comes into manifestation. The Dick and Jane primer suggest the school house as the space second to home where language takes on meaning, where a child must connect the signs and symbols with what they mean for her life. Thus, the movement from a perfectly grammatical passage with appropriate placed spaces and punctuation gives way to less space and no punctuation, to no order whatsoever. The order and apparent logic of the primer gives way to chaos, total disorder and a loss of meaning that foreshadow Pecola Breedlove's descent into madness after she endures incest, rape, pregnancy, and the illusion that Blue eye will make her beautiful.

By the time readers finish the novel, they have ventured into domestic spaces where economic depravity dictates when and how people love, where taboos of rape and incest traumatize and sabotage black girlhood, where racism in the large word shapes and constrains the option men and women have to imagine outside the community exploit the most vulnerable. But Morrison never permits the luxury to the readers to venture into Claudia's Pecola's respective worlds unscathed, as disinterested spectators or as mere eavesdroppers on someone else's tragic story. Morrison deftly creates an intimacy between the narrator and the reader that she then disrupts with the plural pronoun "we" and "our" (162-163). Of course, Claudia understands, at the end of the narrative, how she and her community are implicated in what happened to Pecola, but the repetitions and the

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insistent use of the plural pronoun in the final paragraph of the novel suggests that the readers may too be implicated.

“all of our waste which we dumped on her which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us- all who knew her- felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. 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. Even her waking dreams we used- to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We boned out egos on her, padded out characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength”.

By the time the readers come to the end of this passage, they discovered how they may also be complicit in the condemnation and demise of an innocent child who has internalized the racial gaze into what Morrison calls “racial self-loathing” (167).

At the end, though Pecola’s descent into madness represents a freedom in her own mind (now she does not need the society to approve whether she is beautiful or ugly), but a tragic enclosure inside the narrow spaces of disconnection from community and the large society forever. Thus, *The Bluest Eye* deals with too huge a racial chasm (space) that Pecola tries but fails miserably to mend. And the Dick and Jane primer along with the narrative voice of Claudia anticipate how that happened- “there is really nothing to say- except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.”(4).

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Vol. 3 Issue 3 (June 2017)

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