

An Analysis of Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye

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Abstract— Toni Morrison achieved the impossible by becoming the first African – American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. She has added substantially to the body of African – American literature through both her fiction and critical essays. Her critical essays add immensely to the canon of African – American aesthetics. They enlarge on the theme of African – American woman novelist's role. They give a clear understanding of black life, society and culture. Morrison, the second of four children, was named "Chole Anthony Wofford". She grew up in Lorain, Ohio, during the Great Depression. Her childhood world was not dominated by Black responses to White oppression. It presents a brief sketch of Toni Morrison's perspective on black life. The theme of her novels is analyzed. The black literary tradition is outlined. The objective of the study is specified.

Keywords—Substantially, Immensely, Dominated.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Lorain where everyone was poor, there was not much of segregation on class basis and overt racial hostility was not prevalent. Her recollections of the richness of black lore, music, myths and the cultural rituals of family and community are memorable. Her grandfather played the violin and her mother sang in the choir. Story telling, especially of ghost stories, was a shared activity for men and women in her family. As a teenager, Morrison read the European literary masters, English, Russian and French. Her works deal with major contemporary social issues like racism, class exploitation and sexism.

Toni Morrison, born in Lorain, Ohio in 1931 was the second of four children of George Wofford, a shipyard welder and his wife Ramah Wills Wofford. Her mother's family migrated to the North from Greenville Ala, around 1910. They lost their land and 2 they were share croppers and as a result they were never able to get out of debt. So they came to the North and settled in the steel mill town of Lorain on Lake Erie. Her father, as a child in Georgia had received shocking impressions of adult life and for the rest of his life had a strong dislike for Whites.

Toni Morrison, as a child, had absorbed the Blacklore, music, myth and rituals and thus they facilitated her in using them profusely in her works. Morrison's world, like the

world of her novels, was filled with supernaturalism, signs and ways that were alien to the five senses. She attended Lorain High School and earned B.A. Degree in 1953 from Howard University and an M.A. in English at Cornell University, where she completed her thesis on William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. In 1957, she took a teaching position at Howard, where she married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect. In 1964, she divorced him and returned with her two sons to Lorain. In 1965, she became a senior editor at Random House. She resumed her teaching career a decade later, serving as a visiting Professor at Yale between 1976 and 1978, and then from 1984 to 1989 as the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at the State University of New York at Albany. In 1989, she became the Robert F. Goheen Professor of Humanities at Princeton University, where she remained a member of the Program in Afro – American studies and of the creative writing Department. She has published six novels : *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992); and a volume of literary criticism, which was based on a lecture series she delivered at Harvard University. 3 Morrison became the first African – American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature when she was awarded the honour in 1993. Because of her subject matter, Morrison's career has been connected in both its ups and downs to her race : the original letter writing campaign alleged that Morrison could win the National Book Award because of her role as a prominent Black novelist, which prompted critics to argue that aesthetic judgements should be independent of race. And later, her Nobel Prize was treated by others as simply a concession to political correctness, as though Morrison did not deserve the award on merit alone. The simple fact of the controversy demonstrates the extent to which Morrison's racial themes remain charged, powerful and crucially important in American life.

II. A STORY OF A YOUNG BLACK GIRL

Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* projects the tragic life of a young Black girl of eleven years, Pecola Breedlove, who craves to be loved by her family and her school friends. On the other hand, she is neglected and branded as 'ugly' by her own mother. In her quest for identity and beauty, she has

been exploited. She longs to have blue eyes and blond hair which she considers as a mark of beauty. But her self-image is unable to bear the brutality meted out to her and she goes insane and lives in her own imaginary world in which she is the most lovable as she has the bluest eyes of all.

Morrison's second novel *Sula* (1974) is about an unconventional woman Sula. She does not bother about any social conventions. As she is least bothered about social inhibitions and conventions she is branded as evil by her own community. Morrison through this novel projects the potentiality of a woman to be self-dependent through Eva Peace, Sula's grandmother, Hannah Peace, Sula's mother and 4 Sula. Sula becomes a Pariah of her community; a yardstick of what's evil but gradually inspired goodness in her community. This novel deals with the theme of race, womanhood, the effects of history and the contingencies of love, examining how all the four intertwine to affect the beliefs and actions of individuals. Toni Morrison, no doubt, is one of the most formally sophisticated novelists in the history of African – American literature. Her single accomplishment as a writer is that she has managed uncannily to invent her own mode of literary representation. Her themes are often those expected of naturalistic fiction – the burdens of history, the determining social effects of race, gender or class – but they are also the great themes of lyrical modernism, love, death, betrayal and the burden of the individual's responsibility for her or his own fate. Toni Morrison dealt with various themes like the feminist consciousness, racial consciousness, theme of alienation and repression, the quest of self and identity. The feminist consciousness in the novels of Toni Morrison need special attention as in almost all her novels the protagonists are women and so it becomes indispensable to know in this study, the meaning of the word 'feminism'.

A Black woman must love herself. She, having been a victim of American society, should try to live up to the standard that she wants to create for herself. The ability to develop a positive self-image is what Morrison expects in a Black woman and that is what she terms as African – American feminist consciousness. Black women are alienated from the White patriarchal society as they are coloured and female, and from their husbands as they are female and so considered as inferior to them. A Black woman is a feminist, if she tries to liberate herself, though at a painful cost from the most immoral and unjust world where justice and self-respect could not be restored. Morrison wants Black women to be self-dependent and asserts that they have the potentiality to be so. It is also essential to include in this study the definition of

marginality as the Blacks are considered as the members of the marginals.

Victor Turner, defines marginality in terms of W.E.B.DuBois' concept. He holds that the marginal is one who suffers from an inferiority complex in the domain of his own culture and is always obsessed with the cultural myths of the major (White) culture. This kind of definition does not hold good as far as the Afro – American women novelists are concerned. Morrison's characters too combine Americanness and Africansim, but sometimes the pressure from White society forces them to succumb to White culture.

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