

Beauty: An adoption of self with reference to Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage theory in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

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Abstract: *The idea of beauty varies as it depends on its spectators or self. Most modern people desire to have beauty loved by all and blindly follow the mislead path of beauty. Toni Morrison, an African novelist traces the idea of beauty in *The Bluest Eye* with her major character Pecola, an African girl craving to have a beauty loved by the white society and at the end falls in its trap. Her idea of beauty leads her to insanity. So, this paper highlights the facts that with the lenses of Lacan's Mirror Stage theory one can classify the true idea of beauty and make people aware with their worldwide madly followed artificial and Conventional concept of it. The main objective of the paper is to give a true idea of beauty along with self love and acceptance and not to fall like Pecola, unlike the second major character Claudia- narrator of the most of the event of the novel, a major requirement of the present modern world.*

Key Words: Beauty, The Mirror Stage Theory, Self love, Acceptance.

1. INTRODUCTION:

"Beauty lies in the eyes of the Beholder"⁽¹⁾ a beautiful line by Margaret Wolfe Hungerford has defined beauty in its best way but again the interpretation can be varied. If one has to classify, it can be objective or subjective. Most believe in its objectivity. Conventionally, the idea of beauty like having fair skin, golden hair and blue eyes is desired by all and it comes from the white British society though their history plays a major role in it. But what if one does not fit with the criteria of beauty given above. Is it not a beauty? Is it ugly? Is it not acceptable? Is it curse? From where all this came from? All these questions arouse in the mind and that leads to find out the true idea of beauty.

Toni Morrison, An African writer traces the same idea of beauty with her major character of the novel Pecola. In one of her interview she said "It's a book I wanted to read and I couldn't find it anywhere"⁽²⁾ She wanted to make people aware with the people like her who always refer as background toys due to skin colour. Likewise in the novel one can understand the journey of Pecola as an African girl with a dark skin and defined as not so called beautiful by the white society as she is being unloved by her parents, being an object of mocking at school, scolded by the neighbour and white society. Lack of love and acceptance from the society leads her to insanity and mental disabilities. Except Claudia and Frieda, everyone shows unlikeness of her appearance and existence in front of her. She isn't even loved by her own parents, who were always busy in fighting; due to dislike of her mother she used to call her Mr. Breedlove in the entire novel, every time busy serving her master's pretty blonde white daughter and their house. The limit was crossed when she was being raped by her own drunkard father Cholly Breedlove while washing the dishes. All the events and hatred from the family and society leads her mind for the quest for conventional beauty and being unable to decide what to do or not with emotional breakdown she went to visit Soaphead Church, she has his business card which claims he does magic tricks to solve problems of people. Pecola claims for the bluest eyes, but as Pecola's problem can't be solved he played a trick and told her that if she feeds a dog and it acts strange then her wish will be fulfilled. He himself poisoned the food and the dog acted weird. At the end the disgust of all the events of Pecola's life especially the act done by his father leave a crucial mark on her mental stability that leads her towards insanity. Now she used to imagine a new friend who constantly makes her feel how beautiful her bluest eyes are. If one goes through Pecola's character it can be well understood through the lens of psychoanalysis of her character with the help of Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory to support the main theme of beauty and mental breakdown of the character.

2. THE MIRROR STAGE THEORY AND IT'S APPLICATION IN THE NOVEL:

After inspired by various theories of Freud, Jacques Lacan has also founded widely recognized theory named The Mirror stage theory deals with the various stages of life with psychoanalysis of the mental growth of one. According to Lacan human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body reflected in a mirror, or representation through the mother or primary caregiver produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an "I". The infant identifies with the image, which serves as a shape of the infant's emerging perceptions of selfhood, but because the image of a integrate body does not correspond with the underdeveloped infant's physical vulnerability and weakness, this imago is established as an Ideal-'I' toward which the subject will perpetually strive throughout his or her life.⁽³⁾

For Lacan, the mirror stage installs the ego as fundamentally dependent upon external objects, on another.⁽⁴⁾ As the so-called "individual" matures and enters into social relations through language, this "other" will be elaborated within social and linguistic frameworks that will give each subject's personality, his or her neuroses, other psychic disturbances and its particular characteristics. The process of structure of self as a social identity starts at the mirror stage and brings to termination only with the resolution of the Oedipal Crisis. Unlike Freud's stages of oral, anal, and genital Lacan's "mirror stage" also follows the stages of real, imaginary, and symbolic. At infancy the infant only has a sense of self and is a state of need, this is the stage of real. As the infant develops it reaches the imaginary stage where gaining access to language begins to create identification and the "ideal I". These stages both lead to the symbolic stage where the individual has matured enough to understand language and that language creates the desire to become the "ideal I". The image has to come before the individual is established, you have to see yourself before you can identify yourself. It is Lacan's belief that the crucial at which the child gives up the mother as love object and attaches to father marks his exit from "the imaginary" and entrance into "they symbolic".⁽⁵⁾ Unfortunately for Pecola she never emerges from the imaginary stage to the symbolic stage. From the beginning Pecola had a crucial time from pre-oedipal due to lack of love and nourishment in her life. She doesn't have an ideal family like Dick and Jane as mentioned in the novel even the fact that Pecola calls her mother Mrs. Breedlove and not mother indicates the chronic absence of "m(other)" in Pecola's psychic life. It is obvious evidence of unhealthy relationship between mother and daughter especially highlighted in the scene when Frieda and Claudia to Mrs. Breedlove's work to visit Pecola and they spill the pie in front of the little girl that Mrs. Breedlove tends to. When the pie is spilt she snaps at Pecola but then calms down the "little pink and yellow girl" soothing her and telling her "hush, don't worry none".⁽⁶⁾ Mrs. Breedlove's lack of attachment to Pecola and refer her as ugly from the birth has immense effect on her real stage. Her parents even started to fight in front of her mentally or physically. As an infant the child is in need of love and affection to create a sense of self, from the beginning Mrs. Breedlove creates a negative sense of self for Pecola.

"If she looked different, beautiful, may be Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. May be they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes."⁽⁶⁾ (Morrison-44)

Morrison has not portrait Mrs. Breedlove as a loving maternal figure in Pecola's life and this lack of love and affection anticipated Pecola search for it from other. Her pitiful desire for love is resolved in her significant image of the Imaginary identification Shirley Temple, the racial other. Shirley Temple is the epitome of beauty and everyone loves her, because of this Pecola believes in order to be loved she needs to look like Shirley Temple.

"She desire to have some milk in blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup. Pecola was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face"⁽⁶⁾ (Morrison-17)

Lacan claims that one's desires come from the desire of the other. Because of this Pecola shifts her desire for the mother not to the image of her breast (milk) but to the image of Shirley Temple. Unfortunately replacing the desire for love from the image of her mother to the image of Shirley Temple is ultimately inadequate for Pecola because she wants to truly be loved. Where there is a lack there is a desire. So because Pecola's desire for love is never satisfied her desire strongly becomes to be loved by other.

Morrison has emphasize Pecola's quest for beauty in a very prior stage of novel as in one of the conversation with Cludia and Frieda she asked:

"How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?" But Frieda was asleep. And I didn't know."⁽⁶⁾ (Morrison-30)

For Pecola the imaginary stage exist throughout the novel and the racial discrimination of the society brings unbearable identity crises for her. To apply the mirror stage to Pecola, She often look herself in to the British customized standard mirror and each time she feels as a failure to fulfil her desire of blue eyes and pale skin. Ultimately the journey from imaginary to symbolic leads her mental, psychological and physical devastation. The idea of beauty is socially constructed and follows, so as well in today's world.

"Adults, girls, shop, magazines, newspaper, window signs- all world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink skinned doll was what every girl child treasured."⁽⁶⁾ (Morrison-18)

To fit according socially agreed image Pecola's desire to be what she is not. The difference between Self and the Other is socially constructed, not just psychologically composed. Unlike Pecola, Claudia is very aware of the identity of her Self and the Other. She takes pride in her self-image and is comfortable in her own skin. However she is the exact opposite of Pecola. Pecola desires to be the beautiful image represented by society, whereas Claudio despises it and tears apart her white, blonde, blue eyed baby doll in spite of the image. Claudio learns to accept that the image of a pale skinned, blue eyed girl is worshiped, but because she can differentiate from the other she is able evolve toward the symbolic realm. Pecola is not as fortunate.

To enter in the symbolic stage both Mrs. Breedlove and Polly both are failed as parents and failed to push her from oedipal stage. Cholly is psychologically castrated by the white society and as a reliver of him Soaphead Church appeared to play role of symbolic father by Morrison to fulfil post-mirror subjectivity in Pecola's life. Even though he appears to be this powerful, symbolic figure he is deprived of the phallic in his powerlessness to give Pecola what she asked for and unlike Cholly he stand as "a symbolic realm of the law of the father and play his role as 'phallus'".⁽⁷⁾

“For the first time he honestly wished he could work miracles. Never before had he really wanted the true and holy power.”⁽⁶⁾ (Morrison-172)

With his anger caused by his lack of power as a psychic he chooses to play the role of God, the ultimate father. By creating this role he makes Pecola believe and believes himself that he gave her what she wanted. Because of this illusion he demonstrated Soaphead registers her in the imaginary rather than the symbolic.

“I gave her those blue eyes she wanted... I did what you did not, couldn’t, would not do: I look at the ugly little black girl, and I loved her, I played you.”⁽⁶⁾ (Morrison-180)

As Soaphead Church’s subject Pecola remains in the imaginary, constantly checking her reflection and asking her “friend” for reassurance that she has the “bluest” eyes. Because her psychic is unable to evolve from the imaginary to symbolic all Pecola can do is take the imaginary for the real. She has a complete schizophrenic breakdown, Claudia describes her as:

“A winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach.”⁽⁶⁾ (Morrison-202)

Her mental breakdown exemplifies how she tries to be a normal women in society but it expresses the dominating authority of the ruling Other (white culture). Through the Other’s neglect Pecola is forced into isolation and abandonment of self-worth. As modern People many of us feels the same feelings like Pecola and socially bounded by the constructed definition of beauty and racial discrimination.

3. CONCLUSION:

Throughout the novel the ideas of Lacan’s mirror stage are expressed. Pecola traces many events in her life which lead up to her delusional state of mind. She constantly battles with the desire to be loved and the desire to become a beautiful figure to stand according social standard beauty of white society as many of us are doing to fought for either by beautifying ourselves like Pecola, Physically or through imaginary illusion in front of the mirror ;or accepting ourselves like Claudia. Lacan’s stages of the real, imaginary, and symbolic are expressed throughout Pecola’s life. Either its a family unable to pushed through the oedipal stage to get out of imginary to symbolic, friend of community- all play a vital role to pushed her towards insanity and mental breakdown. Because of the lack of love, or even attention given by the community Pecola’s desire to be beautiful and love are intensified and continue to grow. As both *The Bluest Eye* and the Lacan’s Mirror stage helps to understand each other in correlation.

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