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Internalization of White aesthetics by the Black race in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

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Abstract

Between kindergarten and first grade, children develop socially, emotionally, and academically through the use of primers, such as an alphabet book or a story book. It is the initial step in the mental development of a child. The study examines an excerpt from Dick and Jane's primer, which revolves throughout the novel focusing on the ideal White society. The novel makes use of the abstract in three distinct ways, the first of which features a well-structured excerpt emphasizing the White people's beautiful and joyful world. The second abstract is an exact replica of the first, except it lacks correct punctuation and capitalization, emphasizing the fact that people of color are continually seeking White community's acceptance. The final one is completely unstructured and devoid of spaces, reflecting the oppressed Black community's chaotic existence. This study investigates the internalization of White aesthetics by a variety of Black characters who fit within these categories.

Introduction :

The novel opens with the abstract of Dick and Jane's tale, which is an elementary school reading primer, and it opens with a stereotypical portrayal of a happy, middle-class white family. In words of Gurleen Grewal, it works as "the hegemonizing force of an ideology, the supremacy by which a dominant culture reproduces hierarchical power structure" (24). In *The Bluest Eye*, the cultural and racial domination is exemplified through the educational system through which the ruling group exerts its control and hegemony. Pecola, the novel's protagonist begins to despise her black identity and culture at a very young age as a result of the white cultural and ideological discourses of ultimate truth and tradition that were taught and read to her at school. This school primer of Dick and Jane is used by Morrison as a structural technique in the book. Pecola was unable to relate to the tale of Genesis since she, her family, and her race were totally missing from the narrative. However, the story penetrates her thoughts and imagination, resulting in confusion and self-negation. There are three repetitions of the text, with less spaces and punctuation everytime "until a tightly woven fabric is created, a fabric which will run threads through the unconscious too deep to eradicate" (Armstrong 146).

Nancy Larrick observed, after analyzing almost five thousand books on children published between Nineteen sixty two and Nineteen sixty four and found that "only three hundred and forty nine of those thousand books includes even one black child in the illustration or the text" (Rosenberg 435). The information demonstrates how Anglo-Saxon ancestry and experiences are valued, whereas the absence of Black Africans

from educational resources demonstrates the opposite. The omission of African Americans in prescribed school primers and textbooks is a means by which cultural values, knowledge, message, and wisdom permeate in a governmental or institutional manner. Antonio Gramsci asserts that the ruling group or class always exercises its influence and disseminates its values and ideas across society through educational institutions. Education is not merely a means of inculcating ideals or imparting information; it is also a system through which a person, and especially a child, constructs principles and stereotypes at an early age. The cultural artefacts imparted to a young mind throughout its early years are absorbed unintentionally. This is rightly examined by Marxist critic Louis Althusser by focusing on Ideological State Apparatus, where 'ISA' works through the educational institutions by incorporating only those values in the students which benefits them. Whereas the texts and history books should be designed in the manner by which a student should be aware of both pleasant as well as unpleasant world. The ruling class utilizes this authority and the availability of these institutions to disseminate the values and ideology that sustain their place in society by silencing other narratives and perspectives.

In the course of evaluating the impact of white ideologies and their influence on the enslavement of black culture and its people, it became clear that the subjugation of black culture and its people was the direct result of white ideology. Isobel Armstrong states, "if there is no place at which the self within discourse, the result is a form of self-annihilation which beginning in the mirror of white society, becomes a conscious and then an internalized activity" (147). William Elson and William Grey's elementary school storybooks were so popular in the 1930s and 1940s that their iconic image endures to this day. These were the textbooks that students in the middle of the twentieth century read in school. The book by Elson and Grey shows the sufferings of the American people throughout the war, such as economic difficulties. "This is problematic because studies show that the elementary school experience is central to the information of political orientation" (Sallach 43), and "when alternative, controversial, or 'deviant' perspectives are excluded, students attain only one perspective and the perspective is often 'white, protestant, Anglo Saxon'" (Sallach 43). The ideologies of ideals of whiteness, the perfect family stratum, and, most importantly, capitalism prepare black subjects, as Morrison demonstrates via characters who naturally evaluate themselves against Dick and Jane's aspirations. Morrison also presents the perfect world of Dick and Jane as a myth by placing the reader in a scenario where they are compelled to compare their life to that of Dick and Jane.

Dick and Jane's primer is scattered throughout the work, and the only thing that appears to contradict it is Claudia's story, in which she fights this white civilization and its aesthetics. The abstract from the primer at the beginning of each chapter shows what is missing from the lives of the Black characters that have been seen as actual bliss in the lives of white people without understanding whether these people or characters need those aesthetic values in their lives or not, but it is present above each chapter as an ideal setup that must be matched, and a reader can see that the black characters in the novel are a long way from achieving that ideal. The exact, anchored vision of Claudia reveals how the valorization may be rejected and simultaneously questioned. Claudia's narration provides a solid foundation for Pecola's tale. It also gives an alternative to Jane's idealized world, since the novel's four sections are contained inside her narrative framework. Her interrogation of white aesthetics, beliefs, and hegemony "exposes the fallacy of happily ever after storybook life" (Furman 19).

The preamble is immediately followed by Claudia's narration: "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1914. The Browns in Pecola was having her first baby, and the marigolds did not grow" (3). By juxtaposing these prologues at the very beginning of the work, Morrison suggests a cultural debate between Dick and Jane's narrative and Pecola's horrible story. As the four sections progress, the destructive nature of the two becomes much more explicit and clear, demonstrating the effects of white ideology on Black culture and the desire of Black people to conform to the norms established by whites without considering the consequences in order to be like the master and receive his love, respect, and affection. As one of the novel's

major themes develops, Claudia asserts “there is really nothing to say-except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how” (4).

The first excerpt of Dick and Jane’s tale displays the image of a white idealistic family with the most beautiful and well-structured house with brilliant colors that represent or mimic pleasure. The family consists of a father, mother, daughter, brother, and a friend, as well as a cat and a dog. In the story, this ideal world is symbolized by the fisher family where Pecola’s mother, Pauline Breedlove, works as a housekeeper. This idealized image of a constantly caring, loving, affectionate, attentive, loving, and joyful family and home reveals the strain under which Black people live in order to achieve this ideal world.

The second version of the abstract of Dick and Jane is an identical duplicate of the first, except punctuation and capitalization. This version depicts the world of individuals with lighter skin tones than blacks, which is yellowish and represents the worlds of Maureen Paul, Soaphead Church, and Mrs. Geraldine. Morrison demonstrates throughout the essay the assimilation of white aesthetics by the Black community. These characters discard their own origins and Black identity in order to gain white approval, demonstrate superiority over their black colleagues, and feel better about themselves. In this process, however, they do not belong to either their own race nor the white race. As they enable them to imitate them but never allow them to be equal to them, the white class remains at the centre, and regardless of what the other races accomplish, they will always be inferior to them. This group’s inferiority complex is always present when they are unable to be slandered at the same level as their master race, and when they are unable to channel the power they desire, so they use this power on the people they believe are inferior to them, even though they themselves belong to this group.

In the schools that Geraldine and her peers attended, they were taught white aesthetic principles that portrayed the white culture as courteous, polite, and gracious, while the Black culture was portrayed as horrible and horrific. Geraldine spends the most of her life seeking to rid herself of the darkness and ugliness that link her with the black class in order to acquire civilized principles. People like her will continue this fight till they reach their own graves. In addition to suppressing their emotions in attempt to reduce the characteristics that link them with their Blackness, they suppress their physical characteristics. They create a life that is devoid of emotion and structured like a mathematical formula. They then lead a life without much to feel or touch and erect an impenetrable wall so that reality cannot penetrate and reveal that they are not what they are attempting to become. All the things that may represent her reality are tossed out the window, along with her Blackness; Their home looks just like the one in the Dick and Jane tale. Her emotional and intellectual isolation allows her to indoctrinate her kid with harmful prejudices about Black people, such as that they are unclean and loud, while people of other colours are clean and quiet, like white people. To secure their enrollment in the former group, Geraldine prevents Louis Junior from playing with Black children and keeps him “brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod” (71).

The finest evidence of Geraldine’s internalization of White aesthetics is her obsession with the immaculately clean home with the blue-eyed cat. The cat’s cleanliness is also associated with the concept of internalization of these white cultural values, where the black body of the cat with blue eyes clearly demonstrates the aspect of beauty in the black body, a myth which is followed and admired by the Black community, and which they in fact simultaneously aspire to. In essence, depict the same “blue eyes in the black face” (Morrison 74), that Pecola wished for every day. Those dark eyes reveal to Pecola the answer to her prayers and their potential. Geraldine’s passion for the cat is so great that even her kid is aware that the cat is more important to his mother than he is. She does all of the housework as ideal women in society should, but she has never shown the same level of affection for her husband or kid as she does for the cat. Her dedication to white ideological ideals is adored and praised by the cat, not her family, since it is “as clean and quiet as she is” (70). Geraldine’s cleaning disorder suggests that she has cleansed her Black identity, consequently, her opinions on Pecola were not unexpected as seen in *The Bluest Eye*:

She had seen this little girl all of her life . . . Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. They had all stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked everything. Unblinking and unabashed, they stared up at her. The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. (75)

Geraldine associates with and commits herself totally to White aesthetics and beliefs on the basis of Pecola's expressionless, emotionless eyes. This internalization has gotten to such a degree that she regards persons like Pecola as danger to civilization that is commonly linked with the Black community; in their eyes sits the threat, anarchy. The eyes are so powerful that they heighten Geraldine's uneasiness and despondency. Pecola's entry into her home brings disarray and, ironically, the death of her cat, a danger that was really posed by her own son. Moreover, the disorder resides in her own house, which she views as a symbol of perfection but is actually far from it. She pressures her kid to absorb the ideological principles of white culture, which he may or may not like to adopt, posing a harm to his sense of self and culture. She conflates Pecola's identity with that of the whole black community and portrays her as the disorder prevalent in the black community. Maintaining her white aesthetic philosophy, she urges Pecola to leave her home and refers to her as a "nasty black bitch" (ibid 38).

Unlike Geraldine, Soaphead Church takes Pecola's aura into account, since he was able to comprehend her yearning and the rationale for her craving for the blue eyes. Soaphead Church believes himself to be superior to other beings, even God. When he considers it, he cannot recall a moment when he did not despise humanity. Early in his studies, he discovers the term 'misanthrope', which he finds soothing since it matches his perception of the world. He gives advice to people whom he considers above him because they are "Reader, Advisor, and Dream Interpreter" (130). He also obtains this hate from his family and school because he is not entirely Black, but rather a lighter shade. To protect their lineage from the influence of darkness, they easily engaged and wed inside the white bloodline. Their hatred for their race is comparable to Geraldine's, and by the time Soaphead was born, he had no choice but to engage in this self-destructive behaviour. The last section describes black people and their history of oppression. There is no capitalization, punctuation, or space between the sentences in this rendition, which represents the cluttered and chaotic environment of the impoverished Blacks. This version illustrates Pecola's dysfunction and moral ruin at the hands of her father. As readers, we are able to see Pecola's uncertainty when reading and rereading the abstract and then trying to draw parallels between it and her own culture and identity; she begins to understand that there is no place for her in this standardized society.

Conclusion

Pecola's world is diametrically opposed to Jane's, while it is evident that Jane's world is full of love and so utopian that even white people may find it impossible to accomplish. Therefore, for a Black girl to dream of achieving the same becomes unattainable. While Jane's father is shown as strong, loving, and laughing and playing with his children, Pecola's father is the one who raped her; while Jane's mother is so loving and caring, Pecola's mother is entirely devoted to the White family. Kadiatu Kenneh, evaluating the effect of institutional education that channels white values on Black culture, states "if there is no place at which to position the self within discourse, the result is a form of self-annihilation which beginning in the mirror of white society, becomes a conscious and then an internalized activity" (Kenneh 47). Pecola has a strong desire to accomplish the beauty and love standards of Jane's society, despite the fact that it is almost impossible for her to achieve them. Throughout the part, Pauline's character is shown to be someone who has suffered and is alienated from her family and society. She does not get any kind of affection, and she was unable to pass on any form of affection to her daughter since she never had motherly tenderness and love from her own mother. This solitude is what pushes her to be a frequent consumer of the world of movies, where she was able to find pleasure, and where she learns and unintentionally internalizes White ideals and beliefs.

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