

THEME OF SUFFERING THROUGH RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to Toni Morrison's emphasis on the Theme of suffering through racial discrimination in her novels. She mostly stressed on the issues of Human- cruelty and extreme violence which the black people faces from their slave owners. Morrison is the ladder of success among all the slave writers. Her female characters are the victim of racial exploitation. Mostly the female leading characters in Morrison's novels depict the iconic image of slavery. Women are almost treated as a sex object. Such type of issues Morrison highlighted in her works.

Keywords : emphasis; racial discrimination; cruelty; violence; exploitation; slavery

I. INTRODUCTION

Morrison's first book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent black girl who is obsessed by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes. In 1973 a second novel, *Sula*, was published; it examines (among other issues) the dynamics of friendship and the expectations for conformity within the community. *Song of Solomon* (1977) is told by a male narrator in search of his identity; its publication brought Morrison to national attention. *Tar Baby* (1981), set on a Caribbean island, explores conflicts of race, class, and sex. The critically acclaimed *Beloved* (1987), which won a Pulitzer Prize for fiction, is based on the true story of a runaway slave who, at the point of recapture, kills her infant daughter in order to spare her a life of slavery. *Jazz* (1992) is a story of violence and passion set in New York City's Harlem during the 1920s. Subsequent novels are *Paradise* (1998), a richly detailed portrait of a black utopian community in Oklahoma, and *Love* (2003), an intricate family story that reveals the myriad facets of love and its ostensible opposite. *A Mercy* (2008) deals with slavery in 17th-century America. In the redemptive *Home* (2012), a traumatized War veteran encounters racism after returning home and later overcomes apathy to rescue his sister. *God Help the Child* (2015) chronicles the ramifications of child abuse and neglect through the tale of Bride, a black girl with dark skin who is born to light-skinned parents.

A work of criticism, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, was published in 1992. Many of her essays and speeches were collected in *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction* (edited by Carolyn C. Denard), published in 2008. Additionally, Morrison released several children's books, including *Who's Got Game?: The Ant or the Grasshopper?* And *Who's Got Game?: The Lion or the Mouse?*, both written with her son and published in 2003. *Remember* (2004) chronicles the hardships of black students during the integration of the American public school system; aimed at children, it uses archival photographs juxtaposed with captions speculating on the thoughts of their subjects. She also

wrote the libretto for *Margaret Garner* (2005), an opera about the same story that inspired *Beloved*.

The central theme of Morrison's novels is the black American experience; in an unjust society her characters struggle to find themselves and their cultural identity. Her use of fantasy, her sinuous poetic style, and her rich interweaving of the mythic gave her stories great strength and texture. In 2010 Morrison was made an officer of the French Legion of Honor. Two years later she was awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The novels which I have consider for this research paper are listed below

The Bluest Eye (1970);

Sula (1973);

Recitatif (1983);

Beloved (1987);

Paradise (1998);

A Mercy (2008);

God help the child (2015)

II. HUMEN –CRUELTY

Theme of human cruelty through suffering is persistently resounds in the novels of Morrison. Child abuses and also improper care of parents, infant killing racial exploitation by the slave owners are cause of alienation for the characters.

In the novel "The Bluest Eye" the child character Pecola is an iconic image of black community. She is a symbol of suffering through hatred. The entire society and even her parents conceive self hatred towards Pecola. She is a victim of rape by her father. Her wish for blue eyes fulfils her aims and she remains insane. When she become aimless and wanders in the streets the entire society feels beautiful for her ugliness, her silences make them to speak and her appearance haunts them. She becomes a reminder of human cruelty and an emblem of human suffering.

In the novel "Sula" human- cruelty is in the black community itself .They regards Sula as an image of evil. They hates her for her disregard of social convention. Sula's friend Nel follows the roots of social convention despite her mother was a prostitute. Nel was brought up by her grandmother. Both the friends follow different roots. Sula's affair with Nels husband grows a kind of hatred and bitterness in the heart of Nel and her hatred dissolves when Sula was in her death bed. When Sula died the entire community doesn't cares her. The white community takes care of her funeral.

In the short story "Recitatif" The "black-white" issue, as Roberta calls it, is a powerful theme in the narrative. Morrison shows through her narrative how the racial tensions of the day were so strong that they were even able to divide two people who seemingly care for each other and shared important life moments together. Roberta's actions show how deep hatred can go. More importantly, it shows how hatred of others, such as racial hate, can often spring from a place of self-hatred. Roberta is angry at herself for what she did and did not do in response to Maggie's treatment when they were children. She has carried this anger her entire life, and the reader sees that she uses it to lash out at others, such as Twyla. As such, Morrison critiques the underlying reasons and justifications for hatred, showing how the individual needs to grow in order for society as a whole to grow. Moreover, Morrison shows how effective strong relationships, communication and community are. The power of connection between Twyla and Roberta allows Roberta to finally admit her fears, and as such, provides a starting point for

growth and forgiveness. The story ends on an ambiguous note, meaning that the two women might become friends again or, like the story has shown us so far, might be divided based on racial tensions.

In the novel “Beloved” the life of black people has been burdened with misery by their slave owners who treat them above than animals. Mrs. Garner asks her sadistic, vehemently racist brother-in-law to help her run the farm. He is known to the slaves as schoolteacher, and his oppressive presence makes life on the plantation even more unbearable than it had been before. The slaves decide to run. When schoolteacher finds out that Sethe has reported his and his nephews’ misdeeds to Mrs. Garner, he has her whipped severely, despite the fact that she is pregnant. Swollen and scarred, Sethe nevertheless runs away, but along the way she collapses from exhaustion in a forest. This cruelty makes her lose her child by killing her to escape from oppression. Even her entire community accuses her and left her family in isolation.

In the novel “Paradise” there is a conflict between dark skinned black and white people. The all-black town was founded by the black people to avoid the racism of the outside world in general. To avoid every sort of violence they founded a town for themselves to devote peace in their lives.

In the novel “A Mercy” human cruelty is through economic exploitation. This novel reveals that how the slave owners fail to owe their huge debts and in exchange of money they handover their slave workers. They don’t show any intimacy towards their slaves. This novel also portrays of misogyny in the construction of early America where women are routinely treated as property, raped, assaulted, humiliated objects.

In the novel “God Help The Child” by Toni Morrison human cruelty is also seen even in the character of parents. The mother embarrassed by her birth. Lula Ann’s mother. At last she admits she did hurtful things to Lula Ann, but it was “because she wants to protect her. All because of skin privileges. But Sweetness’ rejection wasn’t lost on Lula Ann: “I always knew she didn’t like touching me. I could tell. Distaste was all over her face when I was little and she had to bathe me. Rinse me, actually, after a halfhearted rub with a soapy washcloth. I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch.”

Strangers are also unkind to Lula Ann because of her skin color. In this way, Lula Ann is a Millennial Pecola Breedlove, the tragic figure from Morrison’s 1970 debut novel, “The Bluest Eye.” But while dark-skinned Pecola descends into madness after wishing for blue eyes to ease the pain of rejection and abuse, Lula Ann leaves her mother’s home as soon as she can and successfully reinvents herself as the one-moniker “Bride.”

III. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

In the novel “The Bluest Eye” Pecola suffering persists throughout her life. None reacts to her loneliness. Her mother always dreams of wandering, hopeless desires and fantasy world. When Pecola has been raped by her father she felt unconsciously on the floor despite of supporting her daughter, her mother opposes and beats her. Pecola was left insane.

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different.

These lines, which introduce Pecola’s desire for blue eyes, are found in Chapter 3 of the “Autumn” section of the novel. They demonstrate the complexity of Pecola’s desire. She does not want blue eyes simply because they conform to white beauty standards, but because she wishes to possess different sights and pictures, as if changing eye color will change reality.

Pecola has just been forced to witness a violent fight between her parents, and the only solution she can imagine to her passive suffering is to witness something different. She believes that if she had blue eyes, their beauty would inspire beautiful and kindly behavior on the part of others. Pecola's desire has its own logic even if it is naïve. To Pecola, the color of one's skin and eyes do influence how one is treated and what one is forced to witness.

This novel describes the various stresses and sacrifices of motherhood and offers varied examples of motherhood. Rochelle, Helene's prostitute mother, is considered unfit to raise her, and she is instead raised by her grandmother, Cecile. Just as Cecile raises Helene in a disciplined and strict home, so too does Helene raise her own daughter, Nel, stifling her imagination and independence. Helene places her own worth in Nel's upbringing and succeeds in manipulating Nel into a traditional marriage. Eva, a single mother, sacrifices greatly for her children. It is speculated that she sells her own leg for financial security. Eva tells her daughter that she never loved her, which affects Hannah's relationship with her own daughter Sula. Sula is pained to hear her mother say that she did not like her, though she loved her.

In this short story "Recitatif" a kind of bitterness is grown in the relation of mother daughter. Both Twyla and Roberta's mothers can't take proper care of their daughters so both the girls are shifted in St. bony orphan home. Each Sunday their mother come to meet them and behaves in a contrast way to each other. Twyla calls her mother Mary instead of mom or mamma because of the appearance. She was mad and dances all night. Roberta's mother's details of her character remain vague. She was described as sick and purely religious. She wears a cross in her neck. It was never revealed from what she suffers. It was mental illness rather than physical. Her mother was raised in institution. Roberta sadly admits that her mother never get better.

In the novel "Beloved" Sethe is not an antagonist. She loves her child above than everything. A mother feeds her baby to strengthen the maternal bond between her and her daughter. Sethe develops a dangerous maternal passion that results in the murder of her infant daughter, her own "best self", and the estrangement of the surviving daughter from the black community, both in an attempt to salvage her "fantasy of the future", her children, from a life in slavery. She took a hand saw and chops her infants neck only to free her from this oppressive and cruel world.

In the novel "Paradise" Mavis elder daughter Sal is repeatedly hurts her mother in a most malicious and obvious fashion. Mavis Albright whose baby twins have suffocated in a parked car; she is 27 years old. The recent accidental deaths of her twin infants, Merle and Pearl. She had left them inside the car - a distinctive mint green Cadillac - on a hot day while she ran into the store to buy wieners for dinner made her neighbors to suspect her. But all of it happens accidentally. Mavis is not in an intention to kill her infants. She cares a lot to her kids. No mother is born to kill her kids.

When there is hunger a mother feeds up her child and she remains hunger. Parents work for long hours and sacrifice their life for the sunny future of their child. In the novel "A Mercy" a mother's approach of a parting with her child is only to avoid her from oppression. But this makes Florence to conceive bitterness against her mother throughout her life.

"To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal."

(Florens's mother, "A Mercy" chapter 12)

The last chapter 12 in the novel is the most important one in the novel because it shows just the way in which slaves were treated by their masters. The slaves who worked under Rebekka were treated relatively well until Jacob died, being allowed to sleep in the house, being given enough food and warm clothes to wear. Other slaves experienced a different type of life

and one of these people is Florens's mother. The woman was gang raped at the orders of her master and then got pregnant. After her daughter grew up, she was able to see that her master now looked at her daughter in the same way he used to look at her. The mother knew that if she was to allow it, her daughter would be subjected to the same abuse she had to endure as a woman so she did everything she could to protect her child. The quote shows just how harsh the women here treated and also the lengths to which a mother was willing to go to protect her child.

In the same way the novel "God Help The Child" is quiet similar to the novel "A Mercy" in respect to mother daughter perspective. Lula Ann's mother never touches her from her childhood. She brought up her daughter only to toughen her to grow her avoid the bullies and racial discrimination which the society conceives.

IV. NOSTALGIA

Much of her novels are viewed through flashback experiences. This reminiscence was authentic in all the novels of Morrison. Some of her novels such as 'beloved' and 'A Mercy' initiates through flash back scenes and some characters in other novels approaches to flash backs for a point of view to remind what exactly was. The novel "Paradise" is complex and layered, flashing back and forth between times and places. Each chapter includes flashbacks to crucial events from the town's history in addition to the back-story of the titular character. The novel, "The Bluest Eye" through flashbacks, explores the younger years of both of Pecola's parents, Cholly and Pauline, and their struggles as African-Americans in a largely White Anglo-Saxon Protestant community. Pauline now works as a servant for a wealthier white family. One day in the novel's present time, while Pecola is doing dishes, drunk Cholly rapes her. His motives are largely confusing, seemingly a combination of both love and hate. After raping her a second time, he flees, leaving her pregnant. In the novel "Sula", Nel reminds of the life and boys in the bottom before 1965. She remains nostalgic about life in the past. She reminisces on how much cuter the boys were when she was growing up and how much better all things were before 1965. The Black people of Medallion now have access to jobs as cashiers and teachers and the life of the people of bottom becomes hectic. The short story "Recitatif" is told from Twyla's point-of-view. Early on, she recalls the orchard at the shelter, though she does not know why this place stands out so poignantly to her in her memory. She then segues into a memory of Maggie, a mute woman who worked in the shelter's kitchen. Twyla recalls how Maggie fell down in the orchard and no one went to her aid. Instead, the older girls taunted her and called her names. Looking back, Twyla admits that she is ashamed of the event and of not going to Maggie's aide.

In the novel "God Help The Child" story follows Bride's current life situation while flashing back to past events in the lives of her and the other characters. Everyone has problems and many have childhood memories better forgotten, but Bride is hindered as an adult by events from her past.

V. CONCLUSION

In the novel '**The bluest eye**' (1970) the person who suffers most from white beauty standards is, of course, Pecola. She connects beauty with being loved and believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by affection and respect. This hopeless desire leads ultimately to madness, suggesting that the fulfillment of the wish for white beauty may be even more tragic than the wish impulse itself. The prevalence of sexual violence in the novel suggests that racism is not the only thing that distorts black girlhoods. There is also a pervasive

assumption that women's bodies are available for abuse. The refusal on the part of parents to teach their girls about sexuality makes the girls' transition into sexual maturity difficult.

In the novel "**Sula (1973)**" I would like to justify that all the women characters from starting to the end persistently suffers due to Racial discrimination and this exploitation stressed the characters to remain unconventional. Sula's entire family is loosely be constructed in each circumstance.

In the Short Story "**Recitatif (1983)**" Racism plays a very important role in this story, as Roberta and Twyla are of opposite races. When they are young, they think nothing of it, but they learn from their mothers what it means to discriminate. As they get older, they dislike each other more for who they are, and find it hard to feel sympathy for the opposite race when they are neglected. In the final encounter that they have with each other, we see a conclusion that is much like our own world today; no real ending of their horrible feelings towards each other.

In the novel "**Beloved (1987)**" I might justify that how horrific the situation makes a mother to kill her infant and no mother in this entire world do so dare fully. The racial exploitation by the slave owners has brought for a mother to choose this dangerous step. Human cruelty and racial violence interrupted the normal living of black people.

As in the above novel it is clear that a mother killed her infant intentionally but in this novel "**Paradise (1997)**" a mother kills her infant twins accidentally for which we should not accuse her. The entire novel mostly focuses on Racism. The main concept of this novel is to avoid Racial Discrimination based on skin tone. To avoid racism the citizens of the society has founded Ruby town so that the white people can't try to dominate upon the black people in general. Racial violence is frequent in this novel.

In the novel "**A Mercy (2008)**" highlighted the concept of how the slave owners sell their slaves to other owners if they unable to owe the debt in exchange of slave. How terrible the situation makes a mother to apart her own daughter in exchange. This departure grows a kind of bitterness in the heart of a daughter for the entire life. It's not a mother hate her child so she departs but it's her intended decision to save her from human cruelty and slavery.

In the novel **God help the child (2015)** "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget." This realization comes too late for Sweetness, mother of the protagonist in Nobel laureate and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Toni Morrison's 11th novel, "God Help the Child." Bride, Sweetness' daughter, hasn't forgotten how her mother mistreated her as a child. Nor has she forgotten how at age 6 she told a lie and ruined an innocent woman's life, in hopes of gaining her mother's love. Now in her early 20s, Bride seeks to atone for what she did, just as the one man she's ever loved walks out on her. In "God Help the Child," her first novel set in the present day, Ms. Morrison crafts a not-particularly-likable, but truly unforgettable character in Bride.

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