

The Impact of Religion and Mythology in the Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

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Abstract

This paper looks at how Toni Morrison uses Religion and Mythology in her novel *The Bluest Eye* to show how society's beauty standards affect how people see themselves. The story focuses on Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl who believes that having a blue eye will make her beautiful and loved. Morrison shows how Christian image like a white blue eye and other symbols make Pecola and others believe that being white is better. The character Soaphead Church misuse religion to control and harm, showing how religion can sometimes do more harm than good. Morrison also uses myths from Greek stories and African traditions to add deeper meaning. The story of Medusa shows how beauty can be dangerous, and the myth of flying Africans shows a desire to escape pain and racism. These myths explain how characters deals with their struggle and hopes. The novel's structure, with different people telling the story, shows many points of view and challenges the idea that there is only one way to see the world. In the end, Morrison uses religion and myths helps to understand how race, beauty and identity are shaped by society and how these forces can hurt people deeply.

INTRODUCTION

Written In 1970, *The Bluest Eye* is Toni Morrison's first novel and tells of Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl living in rural Ohio. Pecola wishes to have blue eyes, which to her ace symbolic markers of beauty that she has learned and adopted from multiple social cues. Set in the year just before America entered World War II, Morrison's novel deconstructs the societal norms of the American family and society in a way that reveals the anguish and futility that many, especially those that live in impoverished communities, experience when dreaming the America dream. Dealing frankly with matter of sexuality including incest, pedophilia, and sexual violence *The Bluest Eye* speaks to the multiple patterns of dominance and the consequence victimization and helplessness that typify many parts of the American experience.

Controversial even today, *The Bluest Eye* has been removed from high school curricula in recent years. Selected for both its beauty and its challenge. *The Bluest Eye* calls upon the Loyola faculty, campus colleagues, and, especially, first-year students to embrace what universities do best ask serious questions about challenging, important, and even dark matters that reflect and inform the human experience.

Toni Morrison's "*The Bluest Eye*" intricately intertwines themes of identity, beauty, and societal pressures, resonating profoundly with readers. Among the myriad influences shaping characters' perceptions, religion and mythology stand out as potent forces. This research aims to explore how these elements contribute to the themes of beauty, identity, and self-acceptance in Morrison's work.

Religion and mythology play a very important role in the novel *Bluest Eye*. They helped in shaping the characters and influence their actions. The characters in the novel grapples with beauty standards of the

society, often rooted in Eurocentric ideals perpetuated by religion and mythology. Pecola Breedlove internalizes these beauty standards, she is longing for the blue eyes she uses the longing for the blue eye as a symbol of acceptance and beauty.

Religion particularly Christian are woven throughout the narrative which reflect the characters attempts to include in the society's beauty standard and find meaning in the harsh reality of the world. Religion also serves as a symbol of oppression reinforcing notions of the white superiority and the inferiority of the black community.

While mythology gives alternate narrative of the beauty and the power. Morrison examines how both religion and mythology shaped the perceptions of self-worth and belonging. Morrison also highlights the destructive impact of racism on individual lives.

Thesis Statement

Toni Morrison uses religious and mythological reference in *The Bluest Eye* to explore the impact of religion and mythology to depict the impact of societal beauty standards on identity formation in the novel.

Impact of religion in *The Bluest Eye*

The narrator tells the history of Soaphead Church, a self-declared "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams" in Lorain's Black community. A light-skinned West Indian, he was raised in a family proud of its mixed blood. His family has always been academically and politically ambitious, and always corrupt. Family members have always tried to marry other light-skinned people, and, if unable to do so, they have married one another. Soaphead Church's father was a sadistic schoolmaster and his half-Chinese mother died soon after he was born. Born Elihue Micah Whitcomb, Soaphead Church soon learned the art of self-deception and developed a fascination and revulsion for dirt and decay.

Soaphead married a woman named Velma, but she left him two months afterward. Next, he pursued the ministry but soon discovered that the profession was not right for him. He studied psychiatry and other social sciences, took different jobs, and finally came to Lorain. He rents a back room from an elderly lady named Bertha Reese, and his only hardship is her old dog, Bob, which disgusts him with its runny eyes. Soaphead buys poison to kill the dog but is too repulsed to go near it.

At this point, Pecola comes to ask him to give her blue eyes. He is touched by this request-his own attraction to whiteness makes it easily comprehensible. He knows he cannot help her, but he tells her to give meat-which he has secretly poisoned-to the dog. He tells her that if the dog reacts, her wish will be granted. The dog convulses and dies, and Pecola runs away.

Soaphead then writes a rambling incoherent letter to God in which we learn more about his understanding of his life. He still feels rejected by Velma, who left him "the way people leave a hotel room." He describes his love for the newly budding breasts of young girls (we have already been told that he is a pedophile). He remembers two girls, Doreen and and Pecola runs away.

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He tells God that he did not touch Pecola and brags that he has rivaled God by granting her wish-she will not literally have blue eyes, but she will believe she does. Soaphead closes his letter and thinks lovingly

about all the miscellaneous objects he has collected. He is asleep when his landlord discovers her dead dog.

Religion is the faith in God who is Omnipotent. The comprehensive study of religion would disclose the implicit body of human activity cannot pay to overlook the implied significance of religion. Religion insists on the democratization of society, offering freedom, sameness and fraternity. Almost all of Morrison's novels are filled with religious themes. If we keenly examine her novels, we can find number of issues related to religion either Catholicism or Christianity. The use of The Holy Bible is seen very often in her novels. It can be a direct Biblical reference or scriptures from the Bible. Sermons and songs are also found in her novels. is a strong basis for this in her life. In one of her interviews Morrison said that there are people who used to speak sermonic language in her family. People used to quote Bible, they have Biblical phrases in regular conversation or they had lyrics or songs. Morrison's mother herself was a singer. So there was nothing so strange about religion to Morrison.

Morrison employs religious symbolism to reveal characters' internal conflicts. The portrayal of a blue-eyed, blonde Jesus perpetuates Eurocentric beauty standards, highlighting societal pressures. For Pecola, this image symbolizes her longing for acceptance and validation in a marginalizing world.

Additionally, Morrison uses religious imagery to highlight characters' yearning for spiritual redemption. Soap head Church embodies hypocrisy, showcasing religion's potential for perpetuating harmful beliefs and behaviors.

Impact of Mythology in The Bluest Eye

The impact of mythology in the Bluest Eye deeply shaped the characters and the narrative structure. Toni explores the elements of Greek mythology to illuminate the social complexities of the characters in searching for their identity and the wroth of one self.

One of the most important mythological elements is the story of Medusa who has a snake hair and have the ability to turn whoever look at her into stone. Toni uses Medusa as a symbol of destructive power of the beauty based on a society. Pecola, the protagonist of the novel internalizes beauty standards in the society, which is white and feels insecure because she is not white and think that she doesn't fit in the society's beauty standards. And this has made her mad which the society has hold on beauty standards

Toni further explores on African folklore, which also drawn out the mythological figure 'flying African' which explores the themes of freedom. The character of soap head church embodies this character as he grapples his own desire to have the ability to escape the social problem in the society. By contracting African myth with the harsh reality of social problem which include racism, oppression and so on, Toni depicts the resilience of the characters when facing the oppression and discrimination.

Toni Morrison explores the blue-eyed doll coveted by Pecola as a symbol of white beauty standard which represent the racism faced by the African American in a society. Through the blue-eyed doll Morrison critiques the impact of racism in a community as well as individual.

Additionally, the novel can be seen as mythic with its storytelling perspective reflecting the nature of history. Toni uses many narrators such as Claudia MacTeer that provide challenging dominant and offer the alternate perspectives on the events of the novel.

Morrison integrates mythological references to deepen the exploration of identity. The Dick and Jane narrative contrasts with characters' harsh realities, underscoring societal ideals versus lived experiences. This critique challenges the myth of upward mobility and the American Dream, highlighting systemic inequalities.

The impact of mythology in the novel 'the bluest eye' extend literary devices which serves as lens. Toni Morrison explores the complexities of race, gender and identity in American society. By depicting mythological traditions and Toni creates a narrative that transcend time and place that resonates with the readers in different level. it also inspire empathy and understanding of human condition.

Conclusion

In the novel The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison utilizes religion and mythology references to explore the beauty standards of the society and their impact on identity formation. Through these, Toni Morrison explores the influence of oppression on individual lives as well as in different communities.

The impact of religion and mythology in literature is a profound exploration of humanity's deepest questions, fears, and hopes. In Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," these elements serve as powerful tools for dissecting the complexities of race, identity, and societal norms. Through the interplay of religious symbolism and mythological motifs, Morrison crafts a narrative that transcends the boundaries of time and space, inviting readers to engage with profound truths about the human experience.

Religion, with its rich in beliefs, rituals, and moral codes, plays a significant role in shaping the characters and the development of the characters as well as the themes of the novel. Morrison integrates Christian imagery and symbolism throughout the novel, using it to explore the themes of redemption, salvation, and the quest for meaning. The character of Pecola Breedlove, in particular, embodies the tragic consequences of internalizing religious teachings that equate beauty with goodness and virtue. As Pecola prays for blue eyes, she symbolizes the desperate longing for acceptance and validation in a world that values whiteness above all else.

Moreover, Morrison examines the ways in which religion intersects with race and power dynamics within African American communities. The storefront church, with its charismatic preacher and fervent congregation, serves as a microcosm of the tensions between tradition and assimilation, faith and doubt. Characters like Soaphead Church, who exploit religious authority for personal gain, underscore the dangers of spiritual manipulation and hypocrisy.

In addition to religion symbol, Morrison explores the elements of mythology to deepen the thematic resonance of her narrative. highlights on Greek mythology, African folklore, and American culture, Morrison creates a rich imagery and allusion that illuminates the psychological and social dynamics at play in the lives of the characters. The story of Medusa, for instance, becomes a potent metaphor for the destructive power of beauty ideals and societal norms, as Pecola internalizes the myth of the blue-eyed goddess and is ultimately driven to madness by its unattainable promise.

The motif of the "flying African" evokes themes of freedom, escape, and ancestral memory, as characters like Soaphead Church seek transcendence beyond the constraints of race and society. Through these mythological allusions, Morrison invites readers to consider the ways in which storytelling shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it.

Furthermore, the narrative structure of the novel itself can be seen as mythic, with its nonlinear storytelling and interwoven perspectives reflecting the nature of history and the collective unconscious. By exploring multiple narrators, including Claudia MacTeer, Morrison creates a chorus of voices that challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives on the events of the novel.

In conclusion, the impact of religion and mythology in the novel The Bluest Eye, is profound and multifaceted in shaping the characters idea in founding of self-appreciation and self-worth, and narrative structure in ways that resonate with readers on a deep and universal level. Through the interplay of

religious symbolism and mythological motifs, Morrison explores the complexities of race, identity, and societal norms, while also affirming the enduring power of storytelling to illuminate the human condition and inspire empathy and understanding.

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