



Nature as a Metaphor in Toni Morrison's Novel

The Bluest Eye

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ABSTRACT: Toni Morrison's novels in English have been studied from various angles. The Bluest Eye is Morrison's first novel, which reveals the struggles of a little black girl named Pecola. She grew up in a racial society following the Great Depression. However, there are more hidden aspects that need to be explored in order to understand the novel The Bluest Eye. The present research paper aims at exploring ecology and nature. In this research paper, the focus is particularly on nature, ecology, and the environment. In a novel as a form of literature, the setting, language, and narrative technique are studied. Through this study, the aesthetic sense of nature is also being developed. It will also focus on biodiversity, ecosystems, life processes, and adaptations. It reveals the relationship between man, nature, and other non-human worlds. This research study will convey the message to the readers that they have to protect the environment if they want to survive.

Key Words: Ecology, Environment, Ecosystem, Biodiversity, Adaptations, Eco-Criticism.

I INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison was born on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, U.S.; her original name was Chloe Anthony Wofford. She was brought up in the American Midwest. Morrison grew up in a family with intense love and gratitude for black culture; her childhood days were profound in terms of traditional songs, storytelling, and folktales. She completed her B.A. at Howard University in 1953. Morrison graduated with an M.A. from Cornell University in 1955. She worked as a professor at Howard University and became editor of Random House; later, she joined Princeton University. Toni Morrison's first novel, "The Bluest Eye," was published in 1970. Morrison received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Nature is used as a metaphor in Toni Morrison's novel "The Bluest Eye" "to expose the characters' desires and struggles. She also used various images, metaphors, and symbols to relate human emotions to nature. Morrison also explains the impact of the Great Depression and industrialization.

II AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To understand the concept of ecology.
- To show how nature is an integral part of ecology.
- The aim is to focus on the link between man and nature.
- To know Indian culture and its connection with literature.
- To highlight the major issues pertaining to the threat to ecology.

2.1 Ecology

The term "Ecology" is defined as the study of connections between organisms and their environment. It comprises biology, geography, earth science, the environment, and biodiversity. Biodiversity refers to the diversity of species, genes, and ecosystems. Moreover, Ecology encompasses the study of relationships between various species, creatures, other organisms, and abiotic components.

2.2 Features of Ecology

- Life progressions, connections, and adaptations.
- The association of resources and energy through existing societies.
- The successional growth of environments.
- The dissemination of organisms and biodiversity in the ecological system.

2.3 Definitions of Ecology

Charles Elton defined Ecology (1992) as ‘the study of animals and plants in relation to their habits and habitats’.

Woodbury (1954) identifies ecology as “a science that investigates organisms in relation to their environment and a philosophy in which the world of life is interpreted in natural”.

III ECOLOGY IN THE BLUEST EYE

"Eco criticism" refers to critical texts that delve into the connections between literature and the biological and physical environment while also highlighting the harm human actions inflict on the environment. Cheryl Glotfelty coined the term 'Eco criticism' in the 1980s, combining 'ecology' and 'criticism' with a compressed form of 'eco criticism'. Ecocriticism is about studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It is also defined as a science that investigates the lives of plants and animals in their physical habitats:

Morrison's writing bears witness to the interconnections between all living beings and their environments. Her fiction explores the bonds that unite humans with the natural world and critiques the forces that sever those bonds. (Outka, Paul. *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. p. 197)

This quote highlights how Morrison's work examines the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the harmful consequences of becoming disconnected from the natural world. This method is a particular way of analysis that explains how environmental concerns such as environmental change and ecological protection are expressed in the literary works of today's authors. Toni Morrison is one of the very few African American writers who distinctly explored nature. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is Toni Morrison's first book, a novel of openings, about an oppressed teenager, Pecola, who is passionate about white ideals of attractiveness and yearns to devise blue eyes.

The character Pecola explains nature's mistreatment and deprivation in the novel. As a fledgling African American girl, she trusts that having blue eyes will make her a member of a society that values white beauty. African culture and society regard blue eyes as a beautiful and fascinating feature, echoing Eurocentric beauty in both individuals and groups. The characters depict nature in various ways. It represents the real beauty of human nature, with its inner suffering and needs.

3.1 Seasonal Changes: Morrison utilizes the changing seasons as a framework in his novel "*The Bluest Eye*," symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and acting as a metaphor for the characters' fluctuating situations and emotions. The author associates the arrival of spring with hope and renewal, while winter symbolizes the characters' struggles.

3.2 The Garden: Claudia and her sister Ferdia, who are prominent speakers in the novel, have a deep connection to the natural world, particularly the marigold seeds. These seeds symbolize nature's purity and the need to protect and preserve it. The natural world portrays Pecola's cruelty and suffering, drawing a connection between the harshness of human society and personal experiences in human society.

3.3 The Dick-and-Jane Primer: Dick and Jane, the characters in the novel, introduce the reader to a world of humble, perfect peripheral families and environments, presenting an unrealistic description of flora and family in stark contrast to the characters' actual experiences. It highlights the conflict between societal beliefs and the characters' experiences.

3.4 Blue Eyes: Bluest eyes are associated with a rare, striking beauty that is not commonly found in nature. Pecola's desire for blue eyes signifies her wish to escape her harsh reality and discover a sense of belonging. The novel's vibrant theme is the desire for blue eyes, which the protagonist, Pecola, uses to make herself attractive and appreciated.

IV RACIAL AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Nature serves as a commentary on race, beauty, and individuality. The societal ideals emphasize whiteness and Eurocentric perspectives. The societal concept of beauty contrasts with the natural world's beauty, celebrating the variety and individuality of human appearances:

Morrison's language in *The Bluest Eye* is predominant with natural imagery, evoking a lush, verdant landscape that contrasts sharply with the harshness of her characters' lived experiences... This juxtaposition underscores the dissonance

between the beauty of the natural world and the ugliness wrought by human cruelty and oppression. (Handley, Graham. "Explorations in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*." *Literature Compass*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2007, pp. 662–682.)

In the above-quoted lines, Morrison examines the intense natural images to highlight the harsh reality faced by the characters due to societal oppression and to show the inherent beauty differences within society.

4.1 Animal Imagery: Cholly Breedlove, the main character of the novel, embodies animal imagery. The novel compares Cholly, the most vulnerable character, to a wounded animal. The character Holly also emphasizes individual hardships and the natural healing process.

V NATURE AS A METAPHOR

The novel's natural imagery reveals the harshness and unfairness of societal norms, especially when the character Pecola finds herself in an aggressive environment. The novel draws a comparison between the life and growth of a plant in impoverished, rough soil. In the novel, nature is used as a metaphor to compare the characters' experiences and struggles.

5.1 The Symbolic Significance of Nature: Pecola's desire for blue eyes is compared to the beauty and wholesomeness of nature as "the blue of robins' eggs." This comparison explores the societal burdens that reveal her insight into beauty and acceptance. Flowers, trees, and seasons are the various elements of nature used by Morrison to describe the character's emotions and experiences.

5.2 Nature as a Reflection of Eccentrics Internal Domains: Through the use of natural imagery, Morrison provides a frame into the personality's innermost ecospheres, revealing their longings, fears, and vulnerabilities. Aimed at for instance, the character of Claudia often finds solace in nature, as seen in her vivid descriptions of flowers and plants. In one instance, she describes how "the marigolds would fade... like the dying embers of a fire whose last breath is nearly drawn" (Morrison, 10). This metaphorical connection between dying marigolds and Claudia's own experiences reflects her growing awareness of the harsh realities of racism and the loss of innocence. The quote shows how Morrison's work examines the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the harmful consequences of becoming disconnected from the natural world:

The *Bluest Eye* is a tour de force of intertextuality linking race, class, and environmental devastation. Morrison evinces ethical concerns about racism's obdurate legacies by yoking its deformations of human identity with violence against nature. (Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Feminist Ecocritical Environmental Justice Perspective." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2016, pp. 645–665.)

Here, critic Greta Gaard analyzes how Morrison connects themes of racism and environmental destruction in the novel, tying the oppression of marginalized communities to violence against the natural world.

5.3 Nature as a Critique of Societal Norms: Morrison uses nature to challenge prevailing societal norms and question the conventional standards of beauty. The character of Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, is depicted as finding solace in nature's beauty, particularly in the form of movies. However, she fails to recognize the beauty within herself and her daughter, instead idolizing the white actresses she sees on screen. This contrast between the artificial beauty portrayed in movies and the inherent beauty of nature serves as a critique of the narrow beauty standards imposed by society.

5.4 Nature's Transformative Power: Throughout the novel, Morrison presents nature as a transformative force that offers hope and redemption. One notable example is the character of Soaphead Church, who envisions the transformation of Pecola's life through the blooming of a specific flower. He explains, "The loveliness of those purple petals reveals only the magnitude of his desires, the wish that he could press their loveliness into her flesh and transform her" (Morrison, 162). This passage demonstrates the power of nature to inspire change and the desperate desire for transformation that exists within the characters.

5.5 Natural Imagery and Symbolism: In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison employs rich natural imagery and symbolism to underscore the importance of the natural world and highlight the disconnect between humans and their environment. The novel opens with a powerful description of the natural beauty of the Breedloves' neighbourhood, contrasting it with the "ugliness" that the characters perceive in themselves and their surroundings (Morrison 1). This juxtaposition sets the stage for the novel's exploration of the ways in which internalized self-hatred and societal norms can blind individuals to the inherent attractiveness and worth of the natural world.

A unique salient example of natural symbolism in the novel is the dandelion, which represents resilience and the ability to thrive in adverse conditions. Despite being dismissed as a "weed" by the characters, the dandelion is described as "a tough little son of a bitch" that "seeds itself twice as fast" (Morrison 7). This symbolism resonates with the experiences of marginalized communities, who, like the dandelion, must endure and persist in the face of oppression and adversity.

VI CRITIQUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EXPLOITATION

Beyond the use of natural imagery and symbolism, Morrison also critiques humans' exploitation of the environment. In one poignant scene, Claudia MacTeer, the novel's young narrator, reflects on the destruction of a pristine stretch of land to make way for a golf course:

They had cut down almost all the cavalcade of niquisential life—crabgrass, plantain, vagrant Virginia creepers, thistle and mullen that crept among the mounds of rubble and broidery anemones, shooting stars, and every green tuft crab shit thing at crotch level. (Morrison 97).

This passage highlights the disregard for the inherent significance of nature and the prioritization of human desires over ecological preservation. The golf course represents the privilege and excess of the wealthy, built at the expense of the natural world and the marginalized communities that rely on it.

VII CONCLUSION

In "The Bluest Eye," Toni Morrison weaves a complex narrative that incorporates elements of the natural world to highlight the characters' struggles with identity, self-esteem, and societal expectations. Nature serves as a powerful backdrop and metaphor, adding depth and complexity to the story's exploration of race, beauty, and the human experience. In "The Bluest Eye," Toni Morrison skillfully employs the motif of nature's tapestry to convey a profound exploration of identity, beauty, and societal norms. Natural imagery serves as a multi-dimensional lens, illuminating the characters' emotions, experiences, and struggles. By connecting the characters' inner worlds with the natural world, Morrison challenges the reader's understanding of beauty and self-worth. Toni Morrison weaves together themes of race, beauty, and identity with a profound ecological consciousness. Through her vivid natural imagery, symbolism, and critique of environmental exploitation, Morrison highlights the interconnectedness of human oppression and the oppression of the natural world. Morrison, with her narrative techniques and vibrant use of nature as a metaphor, explains the relationship between societal standards and beliefs that reside within human beings.

The novel suggests that true freedom and remedial action cannot be achieved without addressing both the societal norms that dehumanize marginalized peoples and the harsh beliefs that enable the mistreatment of the environment. By giving voice to the silenced and making visible the invisible, the novel assists as an influential request to action, influencing students to challenge their personal prejudices and expectations and to distinguish the integral value and beauty of all life, human and non-human alike.

Morrison encourages readers in "The Bluest Eye" to consider environmental issues, as her characters advocate for physical changes that devastate their surroundings due to the influence of Eurocentric beliefs and industrialization. Thus, the author shows the interconnectedness of nature with human beings, emphasizing natural awareness and responsibility.

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