Boring title! Good for papers!

Genealogy of Rejection in Morrison's The Bluest Eye

Intro jumps into it.

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By constructing the chain of events that answer the question of how Pecola Breedlove is cast as a pariah in her community, Toni Morrison in The Bluest Eye attempts to satisfy the more difficult question of why. Although, unspoken, this question obsessively hovers over Pecola throughout the novel and in her circular narrative style Morrison weaves a story that seeks to answer this question by gathering all of the forces that were instrumental in the creation of a social mishap. By using what seem like tangents in the story, we are shown examples of how forces beyond human control such as nature, an omniscient being and primarily a legacy of rejection have come together to establish the heritage of desolation that has been passed on to Pecola Breedlove.

thesis

A pattern of precedence is pieced together in the story, showing the seeds of Pecola's present barrenness to have been planted in the lives of preceding generations. By profiling the lives of Soaphead Church and Pauline Breedlove, Morrison makes a case for the validity of generational curses. Their narratives are appropriately placed in the Spring division of the novel as an indication of the characters sowing the seeds that will be reaped by Pecola. Seemingly, as an example of the ways in which the transgressions of the fathers revisit the sons, the narrator gives an extensive account of Soaphead Church's family history, constantly citing instances in which traits of the fathers (or effects of their traits) followed the sons for generations. Of his family the author says, "They transferred this Anglophilia to their six children and sixteen grandchildren" and the family is described as one entity, the accomplishments and convictions of the sons are the same as the fathers. Soaphead Church, or more formally, Elihue Micah Whitcomb, inherited a predilection for ascribing selectively to truth and "the fine art of self-deception from his ancestors'" tendencies to ascribe to lies about their ethnicity and superiority. He inherited his trenchancy and pedophilia from his ancestors' "lecherous and lascivious" practices and his religious fanaticism from his own father's secret sect.

In the same manner Pauline Breedlove's personal history is shown to have played out in extreme measures in the life of her daughter. From the early part of her life up to the time the reader is introduced to Pauline, she has worn a shroud of shame. The novel says that it is due primarily to her injured foot that she felt a sense of separateness and unworthiness and also why she "never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace" (Morrison, 111). This feeling was intensified by her experiences of exclusion and loneliness after moving up north. She was confronted by prejudice on a daily basis, both classism and racism, and for the first time, the white standard of beauty. These experiences worked to transform Pauline into a product of hatred and ignorance, leading her to hold herself up to standards that she didn't fully understand nor could realistically attain. These standards and feelings of rejection are the qualities that Pecola inherits from Pauline. Her mother, from her birth, placed upon her the same shroud of shame, loneliness, and inadequacy. More significantly, just as in the Whitcomb dynasty, the Breedloves as a whole are at one point described by the narrator as one distressing unit. They are unified in their acceptance of the mantle of unexplained ugliness, shame, and social dysfunctionality. The narrator tells us that "No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly…You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction…And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his own way" (Morrison, 39).

transition

This cycle of rejection is developed further in the metaphors that Morrison uses throughout the novel. Nature is a recurring theme in the story and plays an important role in positing why Pecola is rejected. Claudia, the novel's narrator, and her sister Frieda, in their pre-adolescent mindsets cannot completely understand why things happen as they do to Pecola. However, what they do know is stated in the beginning of the novel: that "there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (Morrison, 9), the seeds of hope they themselves planted had shriveled and died, just like Pecola and Cholly's baby. This simplistic alignment of Pecola's life with occurrences in nature as a means of understanding is reiterated by Morrison throughout the novel. She establishes nature as an important factor in life's experiences by incorporating it into the structure of her novel. Instead of conventional chapters and sections, The Bluest Eye is broken up into seasons-Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. These are constants in nature that cannot be

Notice the in-text citations & the inclusion of quotes to support evidence!

controlled by any human influence and also suggests that the events have occurred before and will occur again. Such divisions in the novel mark a correlation between the seasons and the chain of events in the story. For example, the section marked autumn, which is characteristic of harvesting and reaping the results of spring planting, is the section of the novel where we are introduced to the Breedlove family reaping a "harvest" from the "seeds" of racism, poverty, anger, etc. described in Spring.

Additionally, in characters like the Maginot Line, who is described in natural terms (Morrison, 102) we see a woman who is comfortable with herself and her surroundings. She seeks to fulfill the pleasures and standards dictated by her own volition, whether they be pleasant or severe. Pauline Breedlove, whose emotions are affected by the weather (Morrison, 111), is intimately acquainted with the colors, sites, and sounds of nature in the south. In their presence she becomes tranquil and almost whimsical. The lone description of Claudia's father are set to the natural images of winter depicting him as steadfast and penetrating, the narrator says of her fathers face, "Winter moves in and presides there" (Morrison, 61). In all of these characters we see that natural laws not only govern the environment but are also parallel to the way human nature governs its environment. Morrison is showing a pattern in the man-nature relationship and then applies it to Pecola in Claudia's initial statement on her failed pregnancy and then also in the metaphors she uses to explain Pecola's dilemma. One such metaphor can be seen in Pecola's perception of the dandelion and how it mirrors her perception of herself. In one scene Pecola passes a patch of dandelions as she walks into Mr. Yacobowski's store. "Why, she wonders, do people call them weeds? She thought they were pretty" (Morrison, 47). Yet after suffering the embarrassment of Mr. Yacobowski's vacuous, shame inducing stare the faint glimmer of happiness she experiences in seeing the dandelion is destroyed. When she leaves and passes the dandelions again she thinks, "They are ugly. They are weeds" (Morrison, 50). She has transferred society's dislike of her to the dandelions and it is not until the end of the novel that Morrison fully explains these metaphors. Through an adult Claudia, Morrison says, "I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruits it will not bear and when the land kills of its own volition, we say that the victim had no right to live" (Morrison, 206). Even nature retains the right to dictate which seeds it will bear to fruition and those that it will reject. Pecola is one of these "certain seeds" that never had a chance to grow and succeed because she lived in an environment that rejected her, one that would not and maybe could not nurture her.

Morrison does not stop at the forces of nature or "genealogy" but she also places a responsibility for this social dilemma on an ambiguous god and/or the church. This omniscient being, the creator of all things, both noble and corrupt, and his messengers have in a sense sanctioned the unfavorable in order to validate the hatred and scorn of the "righteous." In her introduction to the Breedlove family, Morrison impugns the Breedlove's acceptance of ugliness to a higher power saying, "It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear" (Morrison, 39). This divine being not only created ugliness for them but it also ambiguously created an environment that rejected and scorned this ugliness. In her youth Pauline struggles with the same type of ambiguity and contradiction in trying to "hold her mind on the wages of sin," while "her body trembled for redemption, salvation and a mysterious rebirth that would simply happen, with no effort on her part" (Morrison, 113).

Ironically, at the end of the novel it is Soaphead Church, an individual well acquainted with theology, who alone posits an answer to Claudia's initial question of why. His letter, addressed to "He who greatly ennobled human nature by creating it," intends to familiarize an omniscient being with the "facts which have either escaped his notice, or which he has chosen to ignore" (Morrison, 176) saying that he forgot about the children.

> "You said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and harm them not.' Did you forget? Did you forget about the children? Yes. You forgot. You let them go wanting, sitting on road shoulders, crying next to their dead mothers. I've seen them charred, lame, halt. You forgot, Lord. You forgot how and when to be God…That's why I changed the little black girl's eyes for her…I did what You could not do. I looked at that ugly little black girl and I loved her. I played You" (Morrison, 181-2).

This letter not only incriminates God but it also incriminates the church. In their duty to come to the aid of the despised and dejected they have failed and instead begun to play God themselves, judging society's mistakes in the name of righteous superiority.

This is evident in Soaphead's gift of the miraculous and Pauline's successfully achieved martyrdom at the cost of her marriage and the lives of her children.

However, Morrison doesn't place the blame on Pauline, neither does she blame it on racism, vulgarity nor ignorance. In The Bluest Eye she depicts Pecola as a victim of an evil that has roots deeper than human conviction and can't be understood in such terms. This vicious cycle of rejection, this embodiment of supernatural forces of the creator, creation, and the cr