

The Idealization and Self-Identification of Black Characters in the Bluest Eyes by Toni Morrison: Using Voyant Text Analysis Tools

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Abstract

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison discusses about the life of an African American women in the early periods of the twentieth century, who were greatly influenced by the standards of beauty at that period. According to Olson (54), these women lived in a society which was full of prejudice and many other forms of injustices, and the females suffered from both sexism and racism. It is noted that the black women were treated based on the colour of their skin and eyes, instead of being judged based on their intentions and deeds. Toni Morrison deeply explores how the blacks suffered from racism and explain the impact the racist's view of beauty in relation to the whiteness on the construction of one's identity and self-hatred. The main character presented in this story is Pecola, who is used to show some of the worst effects of double marginalization and racism. It is a fact that what she perceives as her ugliness as the main reason why she is mistreated by the people around her. According to Koopman (305) it hurts to be rejected and so she becomes so pessimistic to a point where she started to hate her real identity, which she perceived as being different for that she wishes to possess. This change in the perception of her self-identity can only be as a result of the abnormal perception of women during that period. This paper will analyze Toni Morrison's book, The Bluest Eye to reveal the idealization and realization of self of a black character, specifically, Pecola. This study will make use of the Voyant tool to analyze the text and find the most common words in the text and their relationships. The paper concluded that beauty, which as observed is not normally based on a person's appearance, has become the new standard for accepting people. The central character, Pecola, believes that it is only through the blue-eyed girl that a person can be trusted and accepted by others. It is further revealed that Morrison's main focus was to put an accent on the importance of self – identification and acceptance.

Keywords: The idealization, self-identification, Voyant

1. Introduction

Throughout history, the African Americans have suffered from several major issues including, slavery, identity and gender bias, and marginalization. Yuan (104) notes that Toni Morrison in The Bluest Eye explores how difficult it was for a person of African origin to live in a society that completely marginalized and disrespected them because of their gender and colour of their skins. She deeply scrutinizes the standards set by the whites about the beauty of the black women and the damages it caused to them, resulting in them losing their self-image. The central character in the story known as Pecola used to live in a community where they were less privileged when compared to the whites. During her childhood, she was mistreated by everyone around her even own parents. Consequently, she began to yearn to have a blue eye and to be white so that she could be loved and accepted by the members of her society. As a matter of fact, these assumptions are caused by the standards set by the whites about beauty (Abbasi and Shaheena 145). According to Mahdi (45), Morrison was trying to show people how the African American women responded to sexism and institutionalized racism and some of the major influences of the whites values on the lives of the blacks that actually caused them to question their own identity and prevented them from creating a self-image. The author is challenging the acceptance of these standards by both the whites and the blacks and suggests that it is only family, community, and personal growth that should be valued.

2. Research problem

Morrison's The Bluest Eye discusses the effects of the race and gender issues on the young black female's identities. This paper analyses the idealization and realization of self of a black character, specifically, the protagonist Pecola who believed that it is her blackness that had convicted her to ugliness and abandonment.

3. Textual Analysis

The analysis of this text will be done using the Voyant Tool (Sinclair, and Geoffrey 283). In textual analysis, a person can use the Voyant tool to identify the word counts and patterns of word usage by specific authors, a field named stylistics (Rasid 77). In this research, the novel being analyzed is Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. According to Sinclair, and Geoffrey (285), "by counting function words, which do not convey a lot of semantic content, but which are important syntactically (and which occur in greater numbers, making them more

statistically significant.” Some of the important tools to be used in this analysis include the corpus, cirrus, the summary, word trends, and common phrases.

4. Summary

This part produces information about a text. This includes the number of words, the length of the text, the vocabulary density as well as the distinctive words in the text. It was revealed the document contained 51,276 total words and 9,770 unique word forms. Vocabulary Density of 0.191, Average Words Per Sentence of 12.3. The most frequent words in the corpus: like (184); eyes (155); don't (142); Cholly (129); know (127) items, and Pecola (112)

5. Cirrus

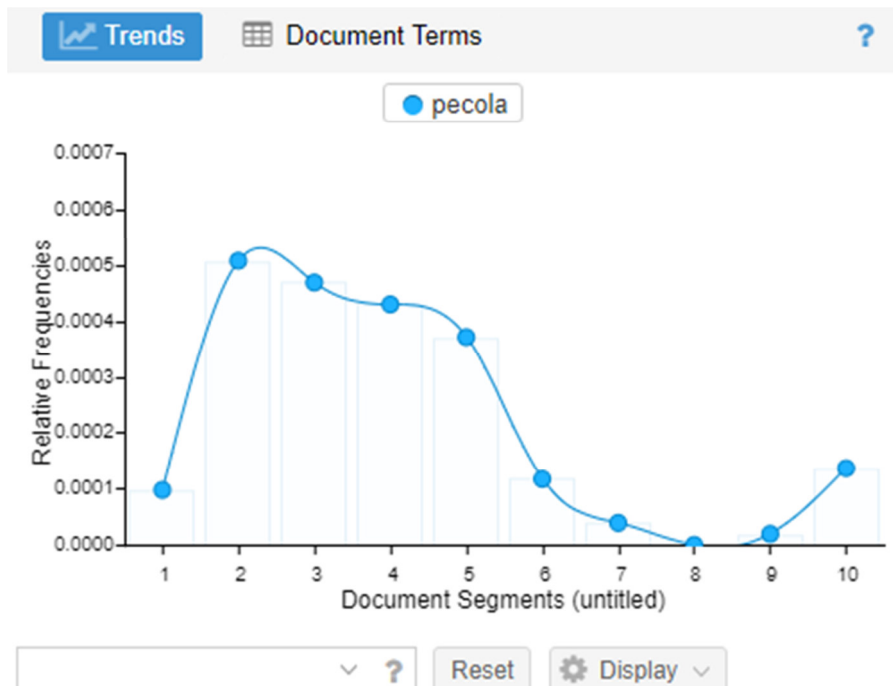
This is one of the most popular tools in Voyant that is also referred to as word cloud. This is a representation of data that is obtained from the analytic process of digital texts. They are very simple and also an initiative that is the bigger the word in the cloud, the more frequent it appears in the text. The words are animated for layout, hovering, as well as clicking on the terms (Sinclair, and Geoffrey, 281). They provide a snapshot but do not allow exploration and experimentation.

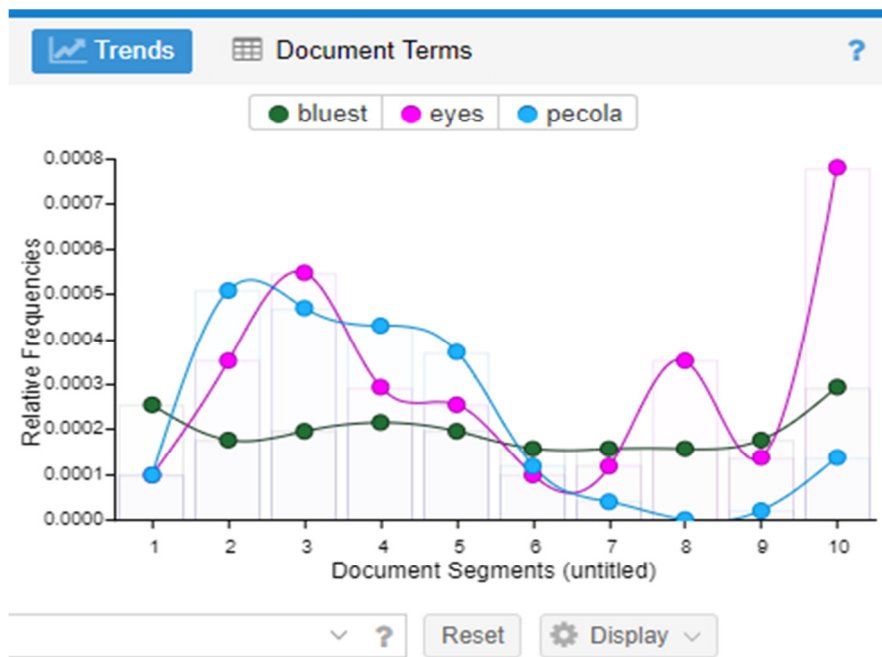


We noted from the word cloud that the words blue, eye, like, Pecola in one hand and in the other hand the protagonist Pecola is black girl (ugly as her family and society describe her); thus indicate that Pecola thought that she is beautiful and has blue eye which is just imagination. She thinks that she is ideal as white bland people (with blue eye).

6. The Words Trend

The word trend includes a line graph that shows the distribution of the occurrence of words across a given text. In this analysis the trend represents a line graph that represents the frequencies of the words such as Pecola and blue.





In addition to that, from the word trend we can notice that the three words blue, eye, Pecola are increasing and decreasing the same; because at first she was acknowledge that she is black (ugly). After that, the trend increased to the top because of Pecola imagination that she is beautiful and has all white's means of beauty. Then the word trend decline near to the lack because of her thinking of idealization that she has blue eye. But her family and society continuously seeing her as ugly black; she did not realize that at all.

At the end of the word trend we can notice significant growing in the three words which has relation to what happened in the novel. Pecola meet a preacher who studied the psyche of the self in United States of American. He convinces her that she is beautiful and her eye is blue. Also, he convinced her that the thing that makes society and her family double marginalized is they are jealous of her. So, Pecola was satisfied that she is beautiful and her eye is blue. The plot of the novel and the word trend show that the realization and idealization of Pecola's self.

7. Corpus Reader

This tool allows a person to read the various texts from a collection. The tool allows one to hover over words to view their frequency and also see more information about the terms (Daines, Cory, and Jacob 3).

	Term	Count	Trend
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 like	184	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2 eyes	155	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 don't	142	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4 cholly	129	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5 know	127	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6 said	117	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7 pecola	112	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8 just	111	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9 eye	108	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10 bluest	101	

9,443

Here, in corpus reader can notice the same words like word could; the word frequency and how much time

is repeated.

8. Common Phrases

This section provides the most common phrases in the text. In this text, the researcher was interested in exploring the character Pecola and the relationship the blue eyes. This outlines some of the phrases.

Summary Documents Phrases ?				
	Term	Count	Length	Trend
<input type="checkbox"/>	bluest eye eleven dollars	2	4	
<input type="checkbox"/>	bluest eye toni morrison	2	4	
<input type="checkbox"/>	eyes are bluer than	2	4	
<input type="checkbox"/>	eyes aren't blue enough	2	4	
<input type="checkbox"/>	bluest eye and	3	3	

The common phrases show that the most repeated and circulating phrases and sentences are indications of Pecola's position toward herself, family, and society

9. Discussion

As noted earlier noted earlier The Bluest Eyes is a story that reveals the theme of the beauty standards as perceived in the African American society. The protagonist of this story, a young girl by the name of Pecola, is one of the people who is greatly affected by this theme. Pecola's life is really difficult as she passes through many tough situations and she even is not even loved by her own parents, especially her mother viewed her as being ugly (Koopman 305). It is observed that her mother, Mrs. Breedlove does not care about at all about the daughter; she only cared about a job as a maid in the white man's farms. She actually enjoyed raising the daughter of the white person because she believed she was more beautiful. Pecola is also rapped by her while she was cleaning dishes. As a result of this heartbreaking event, the protagonist reached her breaking point and becomes insane. She then started to develop complex issues with her identity. After this incident, Pecola proved her ugliness as the one person who was supposed to protect her is the one that hurts her. The father forgets about the role he has as parents and turns out to be a hideous monster.

It is worth noting that as children grow, they go through several stages in their lives wherein the external images of the body play a crucial role in producing a psychic response that creates a mental portrayal of the 'self.' The image created is produced by a reflection in a mirror or is given to a child by the mother (Koopman 305). In most cases, the children will identify themselves with this image that determines the emerging view of them. Furthermore, the mirror images are important in establishing a person's ego and greatly depend on several external objects. Lacan (119) notes that the process of identifying one's self starts from the so-called mirror stage and comes to an end when the oedipal crisis is solved. Essentially, one starts from real, imagery, and lastly symbolic. In many cases, the child at the real stage and here there is a sense of self. This later develops into an imaginary state where a starts to learn about different languages and begins to establish tier identity and the 'I' ideal. These two stages further evolve to become the symbolic stage where a person has matured enough to comprehend languages and the role it plays in creating the desires to be the "ideal I."As a matter of a fact the image of self must first be established before and the individual is recognized. That is a person must first see himself or herself before they can before they can identify themselves. It is sad to note that Pecola did not leave the imagery stage for the symbolic stage. Lacan (120) notes that as a child changes from one stage to another, they rely mostly on the love of their mothers and attachment to the father to help them exit the imagery stage.

In the plot of the novel, Pecola's mother had a very poor relationship which ultimately led to the development of the negative self-identity. It true that Pecola never referred to her mother as mum but as Mrs. Breedlove. This claim highlights there is a complete lack of the "mother" in the protagonist psychic life. Mrs. Breedlove never loved her daughter even after her birth she referred to her as ugly. At any infantry stage, all the children require to be loved and shown affections in order for them to establish a sense of self (Bloom 67). Nonetheless, in this case the mother creates a negative sense of self in the life of the story's protagonist. The author further proves there detachment when she states "If [I] looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they would say, 'Why look at pretty eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty [blue] eyes (Morison 46). As a result of the lack of love from her mother Pecola tried to fill this empty space by identifying herself in the image of others. The pitiful desire for this child to be loved forces her to identify with Shirley Temple. As Morison notes that Shirley Temple was what people

referred to as the epitome of beauty and she was loved by everyone in the society. As a result, Pecola now believed that it is only by looking like Shirley Temple that she will be able to be loved by everyone else. Morrison (19) stated that: “Pecola was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face”. This reveals that Pecola shifts her desires for a mother to the image of the beloved Shirley Temple. Consequently, she loses her mind and begins to question herself and her own identity.

The word analysis also reveals that the identification and idealization of the main character Pecola are also affected by the negative effects of racism and the so-called mainstream cultures that are exerted of the African Americans. It is true that the African Americans have been ill-treated over the years and still bear the brunt of racism. More specifically, the black women have suffered and have been struggling for survival. Morrison (10) states that : “There can’t be anyone, I am sure, who doesn’t know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained periods of time.” The traumatic events associated with racism results in self-division and the destruction of self (Ding and Xiangguo 300). Here the author discusses the adolescent’s fragile identity which can be defined as the painful torment that the marginalized self-has to go through in order to become a person who is accepted in a given society. In this novel, it is a fact that the central character, Pecola develops self-hatred and is even separated from her own identity as a consequence of the beauty standards established by the whites self (Ding and Xiangguo 301). It is the combination of the rejection by her family and the adverse environment that actually emotionally paralyzed Pecola.

The beauty standards set by the whites and the psychological state of Pecola’s mind forced her to completely yearn for the blue eyes, for an ideal ego, and another identity. She actually believes that the person is the bluest eye was the most beautiful in the society. Furthermore, the fact that Pecola lives in a society that is overridden by the whites she exerted more efforts to fulfill what she refers to as the ideal-self and her efforts are in vain, and she gets lost further in a state of confusion between her ideal ego and her actual self. This is also a major reason why she gets stuck in the mirror image and ultimately self-splitting. One can describe Pecola as a weary old lady who lives in a young girl’s body. The pains she goes through cannot be healed unless she gets a blue eye. It can be argued that Pecola’s mum only mistreated her because she had an attachment and tendency towards the white race. She clearly reveals this when she states: “Crazy foo...my floor, mess ...look what you...get on out...crazy...crazy...my floor, my floor....’ Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries. The little [white] girl in pink started to cry. Mrs. Breedlove turned to her. ‘Hush, baby, hush. Don't cry no more.” (Morrison 109).

Pecola has a pseudo-identity, which refers to the identity that is never theirs. In this case, it results in the fracturing of the characters psyche and a life full of psychological trauma. This type of identity is what led to her tragic end. Morrison through Pecola actually emphasizes on the psychic distress caused by the social oppression of the minority communities experienced in the form of sexism and racism. In the novel, Pecola is presented as a negative result of racial self-loathing (Kohzadi et al. 25). This is true because everyone she met, did not consider her beautiful, and even herself does not reflect herself as being lovely which further suggests the superiority of the whites. The white’s supremacy over the blacks resulted in internalized racial loathing, and people from her own race do not see her as being beautiful (Kohzadi et al. 25). All of Pecola sufferings are as a result of racism, discrimination and mistreatment of the African Americans starting from her parents.

10. Conclusion

The textual analysis of *The Bluest Eye* revealed that the book is a representation of the experiences the black female’s experiences in a society dominated by the whites. I also show how they were negatively affected by the some of the female conditions that completely excluded and denied them a sense of well-being. The author also discusses how the beauty standards that were set up by the society at that particular time affected the psychological state of the central character of the story, Pecola, and made her really question her own identity and really wish to have an identity that fitted the set standards. The main character only wants an identity with a blue eye which she believed would make her loved as well as wanted. Furthermore, the black females, being part of the minority community also suffered from sexism, racism and rejection by the whites and even males from their own race.

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