

The Creative Launcher

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Blended Narrative in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

Noble prize winner Toni Morrison has achieved a place in the annals of world literature. One of her best-known novels *The Bluest Eye* has always surprised the critics. The innovation in terms of narrative using different techniques that can be defined as blended narrative has been the concern for her major critics. This article makes the analysis of this narrative techniques and innovations employed by Toni Morrison in her literary masterpiece, *The Bluest Eye*. This article defends the different narrative techniques employed and their proper purpose at a particular time. The author has used Dick and Jane primer as an epigraph to the novel in three different ways and as ironical titles to different chapters. The author has used different narrators to serve the specific purposes. The novel begins with Claudia as a narrator, and then there are sections of zero focalized narrations and some sections of female narration in first person narrator. However, one is surprised why does the writer employ this technique? This article tries to answer this.

Keywords- *Focalization, Blended narrative, Toni Morrison*

Writers seldom resist the ways to distort the linear sequence of events in a fiction which differentiates the plot from the story or recite from *histoire* equivalent terms from different narratological schools. Doing a kind of violence to the order of events in a fiction is imperative as well as it makes it provocative and suspended. In addition to it, the writer's usage of different narrators or schemes of narration play an important role to create a desired effect. Apart from this narratological perspectives, symbolism, focalization, use of myths also play an important role in the expression of literary art in general and novel in particular.

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These are the things that the author Toni Morrison has used in her literary masterpiece *The Bluest Eye*, "My beginnings as a novelist were very much focused on creating this discomfort and unease in order to insist that the reader rely on another body of knowledge." (Wendy Harding et al.)

Among the different narrative strategies employed by Toni Morrison in her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, that deserves first place is the use of an excerpt from a white school primer which was taught in all the schools in the USA during 1940's, as an epigraph to the novel. The primer is written in three different versions suggesting the degradation from order to chaos. According to Klotman, "it serves as a synopsis of the tale that is to follow." (1979-123). In the first version the primer is written in proper grammar and punctuation, that represents an ideal white family of middle class, although the race of Dick and Jane is not clear. Critics have called it as the "idyllic" Dick and Jane "Utopia". According to this text morality and prosperity in addition to perfectness and complacency is associated with white family. Klotman claims that the alien white world represented by the Fisher family that affects the lives of the black children and their families while excluding them is symbolized by the first version of the primer.

The second version of the primer is without any capitalization as well as punctuation. This suggests the mimicry of the ideal white standards in favor of white supremacy, mimics and mixed race indulged in the costumes and values of the dominant culture in order to establish an identity and win acceptance among the white society. They suggest the world of lighter complex world and mulattoes, Geraldines and Maureen Peals. They aspire to be typical mulattoes who live by white middle class values.' (Joodaki and Vajdi)

The third version is without any punctuation and without any space between the words running as a single word suggesting chaotic and overcrowded world of poor blacks anticipating the disorder and moral chaos of breed loves. Snippets from the third version of the primer are also used to head as ironic titles to the different sections of the narrative. They are appropriate to every section of the narrative they head. They reflect the aspirations for the white standard and focalize the plight of the aspirers. They make the white standards ubiquitous throughout the novel. The direct synthesis of this irony plays an important part in the narrative technique of the novel. Actually the three versions of the primer are used as metaphors for the ideal, mimic and alienated societies.

Another important feature of the narrative technique employed is the blending of different types of narrators to make a reliable narration used as focaliser, there are sections of omniscient narrator as well as first person narration by a character named Pauline. Claudia is an adult narrator trying to recall her childless experience with an irony of her understanding as a child. She vividly narrates experiences as well as concretely describes the events and

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situation she is part of. The vividness of her memory can be reflected from the fact that she uses indefinite tense forms to narrate her.

Rosemary Villanuci, our next door friend who lives above her father's cafe, sits in a 1939 Buick eating bread and butter.

He smelled and wonderful. like trees and lemon vanishing cream, and Nu Nyle hair oil and flecks of Sen Sen.

I picked up the pants with two fingers and looked about for something to dig a hole with.

In order to handle the reliability of the narrative, there is zero focalization narrative. This omniscient narration is used to describe the narratives headed by the third version of Dick and Jane primer epigraph, which narrate the home and family relations of Breedloves and Geraldines. The narrative also narrates the part of the life story of Cholly Breedlove who is the father of protagonist Pecola and Soaphead Church. Thus, it proves that from the reliability point of view the omniscient narration is important. We can pin point these arguments by using some passages from omniscient narration. "the only living thing in the Breed loves house was the coal store, which lived independently of everything and everyone....." the fire seemed to live, go down, or die according to its own schemata."(*The Bluest Eye*)

To describe the relationships and their emotional state omniscient narration is only reliable narrative.

Cholly and Mrs Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their love making He fought her the way as coward fights a man with feet, the palms of his hand and teeth. She, I turn, fought back in a purely feminine way with frying pans and pokers and occasionally a flatiron would sail towards his head.

To access the thinking of the main protagonist, Pecola, Claudia, as a narrator would have been a tremendous failure, it is in writer's insight into critical dimension that relies on Claudia as well as omniscient narrator to confirm to the reliability of the narrative from Pecola's point of view. Here we can affirm it.

"Please God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away...The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left.

How beautiful she thought ... she was deep in admiration of the flowers when Junior said, "Here! "Pecola turned. "Here is your kitten," he screeched. And he threw a big black cat right in her face...

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Junior was laughing and running around the room clutching his stomach delightedly. Pecola touched the scratched place on her face and felt tears coming.

The narrative about Cholly Breedlove and Soaphead Church has also omniscient narration wanting. Their narration gives a plightful account of crossbred mulatto in its mixed blood, represented by Soaphead Church.

To defend the zero focalized narrative we can mention one of the passages of the state of mind of Cholly when he rapes his own daughter.

Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he saw or what he felt. Then he became aware that he was uncomfortable; next he felt the discomfort dissolve into pleasure. The sequence of his emotion was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love why did she have to look so whipped she was a child –unburdened – why was not she happy ? The clear statement of her misery was an accusation. He wanted to break her neck but tenderly.

Again, we see, how important is omniscient narration, as Claudia could not have access to other's thinking. Regarding Soaphead Church's narrative, we can have a glimpse. "The bastard too was grateful, and regarded as his life's goal the hoarding of this white strain. He bestowed his favors on a fifteen year old girl of similar parentage."

There is a section of narrative about Pecola's mother Pauline in first person narration. Why does the author use omniscient narration for male characters and other narration and first person narration for female characters? The only purpose is to give voice to the female characters and thus make the novel even more feminist and black feminist. It may have used to suggest the deepest agonies of black females in a more personalized way, who think who are lowest in the hierarchy of race and class oppression. In this section we also come to know that the desire for the white standards of beauty is embedded in black people. It seems that this idea is embedded in her genetic material passed in Pecola at a higher degree, and is cause of her final collapse into extinction. As we can see, in Pauline, her desire for white standards:

I remember one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I would have seen hers on a magazine. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just did not care no more after that. I let my hair go back, planted it up and settled down at just being ugly.

Now we consider the plot construction. Novel is divided into four parts each part named after the seasons, beginning with autumn and ending with spring. As is the case with modernist literature we see that the archetypes are dislocated from their traditional connotation, in *The Bluest Eye* the themes of the different seasons have been deconstructed. "Her depiction of the cycle of the seasons, doesn't seem to have been used in the sense that

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the passage of narrative have any relation to the story of the novel. We see that there is nothing like spring in the section named spring as the narrative gives us past life history of the three characters, Pauline, Soaphead Church and Cholly Breedlove. The seasons have been used as symbols and deconstructed motifs in the novel. Northrop Pyre in his 'Archetypes of Literature' has given the traditional meaning of the four seasons in literature; the spring season symbolizes revival, creation, defeat of powers of darkness; the summer season-marriage, perfection; Autumn seasons- fall, dying goal isolation of hero; winter season - myths of floods and chaos, defeat of hero etc. But in her novel, Morrison disrupts all. Pecola, the heroine of the novel gets pregnant in spring season symbolizing fall or virtual anticipated collapse. In summer season her defeat in the form of her madness and death of her father's baby inside her occurs. Winter seasons, although anticipating Chaos that is to fall seems most perfect season in the novel.

Coming to the narrative about sex we come close to T.S Eliot's *Wasteland*. The perversion of sex and sexual themes is one of the important motifs of the novel. In Eliot's *Wasteland*, people engage in sex without sharing, indeed without even a minimal concern for their partners...In Morrison's world, marriage becomes, for the most of the characters, an escape from their humdrum previous existences; sex is economic (for the prostitutes), pristine (for the likes of Geraldine and Soaphead Church), or degenerative (for Pauline); change, though constant, does not bring improvement in people's lives ...(Trudier Harris)

Morrison appropriates the Persephone and Demeter myth to discuss the sexual and psychological victimization of women. Rape and sexual molestation is a prevailing theme in classical mythology. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* recounts numerous stories of women who are violated by men who desire them. Apollo's pursuit of Daphne, would be classified as sexual harassment today. Philomela is raped and her tongue is mutilated by Tereus after a brutal attack. When the *Bluest eye* was published, it became part of an emerging Persephone victimization figure. Whereas in the Archetypal narrative, Persephone victimization is a result of her gender inferiority-Hades is able to abduct her because she is a helpless female-with Morrison's Persephone figure the intersecting oppression of race, class, and gender contribute to her subversion. Unlike the mythic Persephone or Pepita, Pecola have no Demeter figure to rescue her. As a poor, black child, Pecola lives the margins of society. The narrative of incest and consequent barrenness of the soil archetype takes us back to the ancient Greeks mythologies and other fertility myths such as Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*.

In the italicized preface to the novel the narrator; Claudia Macteer now grown up, says:

Quiet as its kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds didn't grow. A little examination and much less melancholy would

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have proved to us that our seeds were not the only that didn't sprout; nobody's did.

In the legend of Oedipus, then, marriage with Jocasta doesn't arbitrarily follow hard upon victory over the sphinx the audacious union of marked words or of consanguine unknown to themselves engenders decay and fermentation, the unchaining of natural forces – one thinks of Theban Plague – first as impotence in sexual matters (and in the ability to initiate a proposed dialogue) dries up animal and vegetable fertility. (Claude Levi Straus)

Going so far in unraveling the narrative structure of *The Bluest Eye* it would not be justified to disregard what the author herself says about the narrative handling of the different narrative voices. She herself claimed it in 1977 interview. It was her intimacy with Pauline that she took parts with her to consolidate the narrative structure.

When I wrote sections on Cholly... I didn't that as intimately as I knew Pauline... But it is the only time .When I got to Pauline... I could not make it. I did not know what to write or how .And I sort of copped out anyway in the book because I used two voices, her's and the author's. There were certain things she couldn't know and I had to come in and then there were certain things the author would say that I wanted in her language , so that there were two things, two voices which I had regarded, at any rate, as a way in which to do something second best. (Stepto 368-87)

In an interview published in 1986 she even said she would have like to rewrite the novel.

I would not have the mother, for example speaking. That was not any good because she did not know enough. Then I wrote with the narrator speaking. That was not any good, it sounded pompous. So I mixed them, that's a cop-out because I couldn't do it right; now I know how And the ending wouldn't be that way. I mean, it would have that information but I would have more courage there.

At the end the novel ends on a note of tragedy. We can allude the narrative structure of the novel to the convex lens ray diagram. The narrative of the three main characters Cholly, Pecola's father; Pauline, Pecola's mother and Soaphead Church run parallel to each other like the incident rays of light and after passing through the convex lens all meet at the focus that is Pecola and make her a scapegoat. Pauline having the dominant aspirations of the white standards of beauty, Cholly unaccustomed with actual family relation- being disowned by his mother and disinherited by his father and Soap head Church, too sophisticated to compose himself into simple personality, who together revenged their aspirations of life upon an unfortunate Pecola Breedlove. It seems that they revenge their

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agony on her .Pauline is her way, Cholly totally destroying her, Soaphead Church giving her the illusion that she got her blue eyes, *The Bluest Eyes*.

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